

CONSUMER MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

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November 2014

Wanderlust

NORTHERN LIGHTS

WHATEVER YOUR BUDGET

Win!

A trip to Malaysia
for two people...
See page 4



HIDDEN BEACHES
TRAVEL SECRETS

CANADA

BERLIN

CROWD-FREE BRAZIL

HAITI

NORTH KOREA

Hello Tomorrow



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In the know
The best travel secrets can be revealed by a good guide – we reveal this year's best on p104

Welcome



Pssst, we'd like to share a secret or two...

Brazil isn't just about Rio. North Korea is open to tourism (if you know who to travel with and watch your Ps and Qs). Think you've 'done' Canada? What about Nunavik? Did you know seeing the northern lights in Lapland doesn't have to be expensive?

In this issue, we hope to surprise you with some lesser-known places and different ideas. We have even surprised ourselves – by running our first major feature on beaches. But not to worry, these well-hidden shores won't involve a battle over sunbeds!

To help you plan your next trip we asked our regular experts to share their top tips for must-see destinations in 2015 (p24). But for true travel secrets you can't beat the value of a good guide. Meet some of the best in the world with our Guide Awards results revealed on p104.

For me, this year's best kept secret was Macedonia. I'd seen a post about the country on the myWanderlust area of wanderlust.co.uk and it intrigued me so much that it made me want to go. I wasn't disappointed. Mountains, lakes, wildlife, good food and wine, heritage, incredible value – it was too short a visit, and I am sure I'll go back.

So please share your secrets on the Wanderlust website – you never know who it will inspire next!

Lyn

Lyn Hughes
Editor-In-Chief/Publisher/Co-founder

THE TEAM

What have they been up to this month?



PHOEBE SMITH
♦ EDITOR ♦
Heading for Québec's magical and pristine Arctic region: Nunavik
SEE PAGE 28



SARAH BAXTER
♦ ASSOCIATE EDITOR ♦
Discovering the most secluded beaches that nature has to offer
SEE PAGE 112



TOM HAWKER
♦ PRODUCTION EDITOR ♦
Feeling increasingly intrigued the more he reads about North Korea
SEE PAGE 88



ALEX GREGG
♦ EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ♦
Exploring the other Newcastle and Northern Ireland's hidden wonders
SEE PAGE 135

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?

Subscribers now get a special and exclusive cover that showcases our great travel photography. Picked us up on the newsstand? You'll notice we're now *Wanderlust Travel* – the same award-winning content as the subscriber edition, but now with a great new look.



Wanderlust
consumer magazine of the year



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In memory of co-founder & publisher **Paul Morrison**

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Brought to you in part by these top guides...



EFRAIN VALLES

Peruvian guide for Amazonas Explorer
(www.amazonas-explorer.com)

'Effie' has spent 12 years leading tours in Peru. Find out which prize he was awarded in the 2014 Wanderlust World Guide Awards on p104

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

Mountain.

First great travel experience?

Hiking and exploring the Central Andes.

Favourite journey?

Visiting the UK and running the London Marathon dressed in an Inca costume. It was fantastic.

Top five places worldwide?

I don't know about five but the first two are easy: Machu Picchu and the Amazon jungle of Peru.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

Peru of course!

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

South Africa.

Guilty travel pleasure when guiding?

I always take a small teddy bear and little metal car belonging to Joshua, my six-year-old son, to keep him close to me wherever I am.



CHARLIE JAQUES

Guide in France for Back-Roads Touring
(www.backroadstouring.com)

'CJ' has filled a dozen passports with stamps from his travels as a guide; he now focuses on France and trains NGO staff. Check out where he placed on p104

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

I am the ocean, leading out of the jungle, spilling off a mountain.

First great travel experience?

Seychelles. Mum and Dad were just so adventurous now I look back on it. Imagine four kids in the Seychelles in the 70s?

Favourite journey?

The next one I am going to take.

Top five places worldwide?

An impossible question really... but if I have to compartmentalise travel places: home; any bar shared with friends; the driving seat of a Dragoman truck; Le Caprice, London; a road stop in India.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

The Russian space station stamp.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

Bhutan.

Guilty travel pleasure when guiding?

Green tea, in my own mug, in my room.



BUNYONG ROERN

CEO (Chief Experience Officer) at G Adventures
(www.gadventures.co.uk)

Bun is a former secondary school teacher, so sharing knowledge is in his nature. Find out if it helped him get top marks in this year's Guide Awards on p104

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

A mountain, as it is so huge and despite the weather it can't be moved.

First great travel experience?

Many Westerners dream of going to exotic places like Bhutan or Nepal, but for me, seeing modern, developing countries like America and Canada in 2013 was exciting.

Favourite journey?

Visiting Canada and America was my favourite – it was a lifelong dream.

Top five places worldwide?

Angkor Wat; NYC; London; Egypt; Rome.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

America/Canada, as it was difficult to obtain the visas.

Passport stamp you'd most like to have?

UK – it is number one on my wishlist.

Guilty travel pleasure when guiding?

Having one glass of red wine at the end of each day.



LEWIS MANGABA

Wildlife lover and guide for Asilia Africa
(www.asiliaafrica.com)

Head Guide at Oliver's Camp in Tanzania, Lewis knows all there is to know about tracking big game – but was that enough to see him win at the Guide Awards (p104)?

Mountain, desert, ocean or jungle...?

Jungle.

First great travel experience?

Guiding in Zimbabwe through some of the greatest national parks, like Mana Pools and Hwange. You walk guests past prides of lion and big bull elephants at such close range they learn to respect nature.

Favourite journey?

Exhilarating and breathtaking sightings of millions of wildebeest plunging into the Mara River in the northern Serengeti of Tanzania.

Top five places worldwide?

RGS London; Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe; Serengeti, Tanzania; Grand Canyon, USA; the Galápagos, Ecuador.

Passport stamp you're proudest of?

UK – stamped this month for the Awards.

Guilty travel pleasure when guiding?

Visiting the Amazon rainforest.



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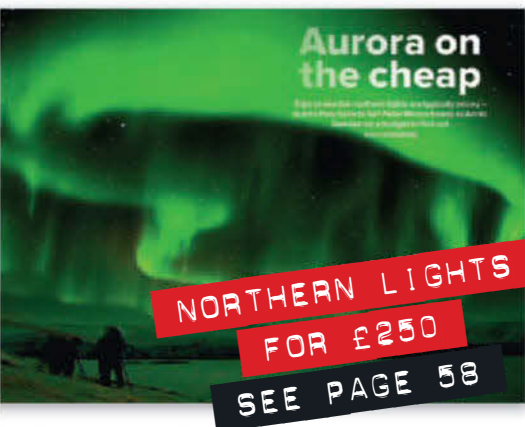
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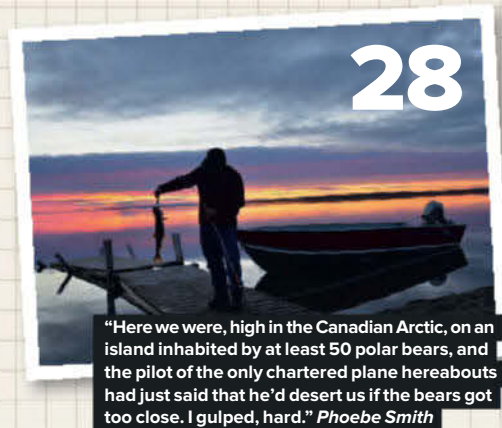
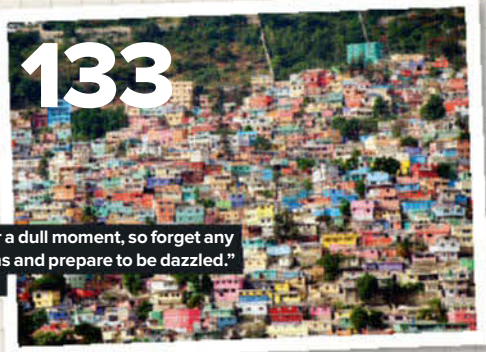
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- 112 Hidden beaches** From super snorkel spots to sands a-swarm with penguins, we reveal 22 of the world's best hidden beaches. Did we include your favourite?

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Look past the bad press and earthquake woes to discover Haiti's much-maligned capital; gateway to a rather different Caribbean

135 Short Break: Newcastle, NI

Misty mountains, untouched sand dunes and a luscious Narnian landscape – take a trip to this magical corner of Northern Ireland

137 Travel Icon: Berlin Wall

A quarter of a century ago, the barricade between East and West Berlin was torn down; 25 years on, we look at what's still left and the vibrant city that's risen around it



Sweden, p58

Northern Ireland, p135

Berlin, p137

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"It was a vertical, airy city of grandiose squares, fountains, parks and marble-clad monuments, with apartment blocks organised as urban collectives incorporating government shops that ration everything from rice to state manufactured underwear." *MA Ryder*

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This is your last call to enter the acclaimed *Wanderlust Travel Photo of the Year* competition to win a commission to the budding snapper's dream of West Africa

The sand seems to go on forever here, as beach becomes dune, becomes coastal forest...

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TALKING HEADS

Kate Humble, p20

"For me, travelling is being able to feel like you can have an immersive experience with local people. Public transport is brilliant for that. You go on African minibuses – instantly you will be in conversation and find out stuff that you wouldn't find out if you were on an official tour."



NORTHERN EXPOSURE

Russia

Photographer: **Cristian Barnett**

Dissecting eight regions – Russia, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Canada, Alaska, Greenland and Sweden – the Arctic Circle is an unusual domain of both endless sunlight and the deepest darkness. *Life on the Line*, a dazzling photobook by Newcastle-born photographer Cristian Barnett, explores what it's like to exist at such northern extremes. The book's fascinating images – including this Russian Rudolph, spotted in the town of Yar-Sale on the Yamal Peninsula – were all captured within 50km of the line.

Life on the Line: People of the Arctic Circle by Cristian Barnett (£30, Polarworld) is available to order from www.polarworld.co.uk

360°

V i e w f i n d e r





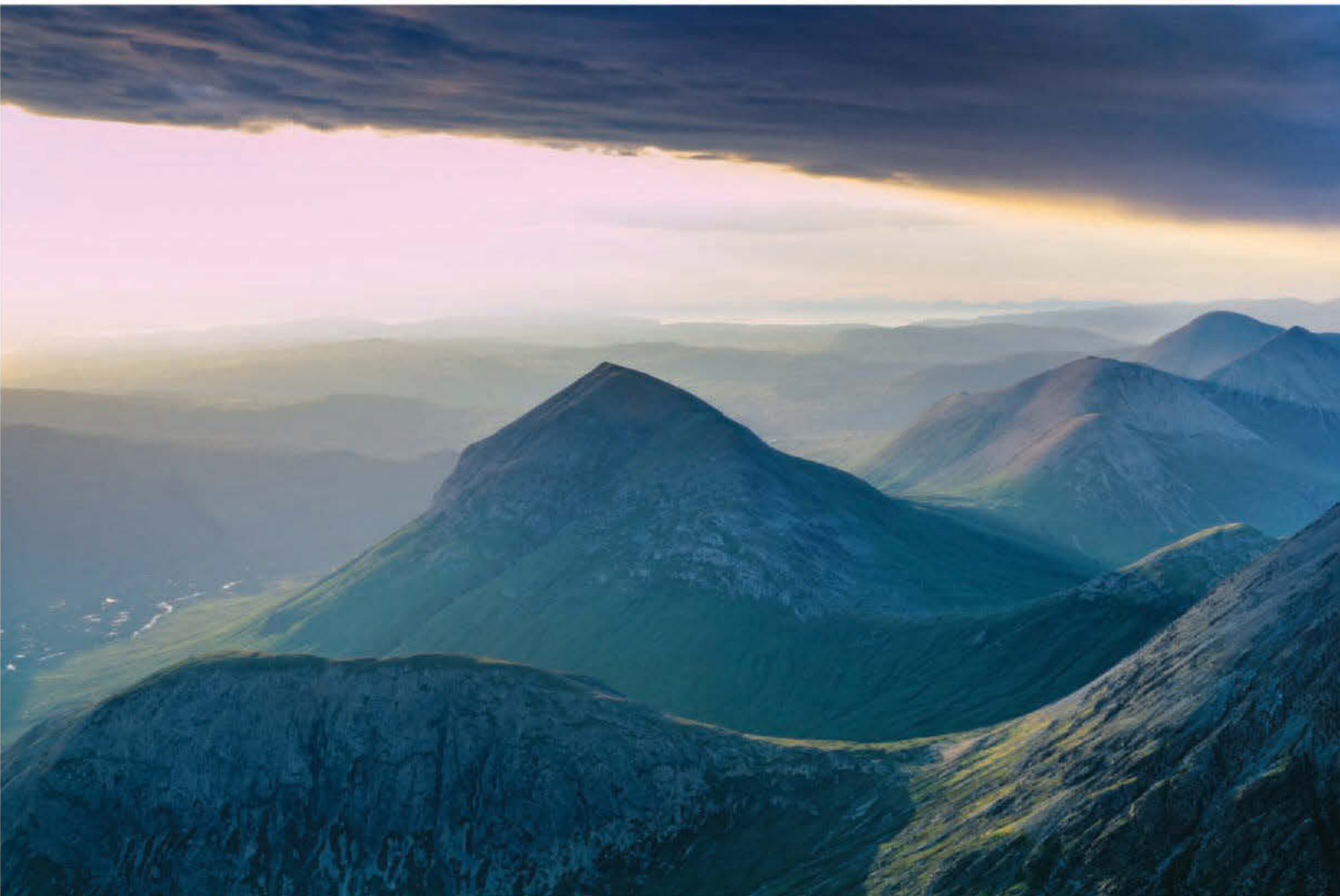


EYE IN THE SKY

Kenya

Photographer: **David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust**
An elephant is killed for its ivory every 15 minutes in Kenya. Even this small elephant herd, guarded by an aerial patrol from the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (DSWT), is at risk from poachers. But the charity is stepping up its anti-poaching efforts, particularly in the Tsavo Conservation Area – home to the country's single largest population of elephants. Daily flights by the charity coordinate with ground patrols to ensure that the populations are as protected as they can be.

Find out more at sheldrickwildlifetrust.org or read our interview with DSWT project manager, Benjamin Kyalo, online at: www.wanderlust.co.uk/151



UPLIFTING OUTLOOKS Scotland

Photographer: **Colin Prior**

There's never been a better time to celebrate the best of Scotland's landscapes – still one of our favourite parts of the UK. And photographer Colin Prior has done just that in his new book. "I'm motivated to create imagery that will inspire people, because I believe if I inspire people, I can take them on a journey," says Colin.

Pictured here are just two of the 200 epic images in the book – here taken from Blaven on the Isle of Skye and capturing the basalt columns on the Isle of Canna. ***Scotland's Finest Landscapes* (£75, Constable & Robinson) by Colin Prior is published in November**

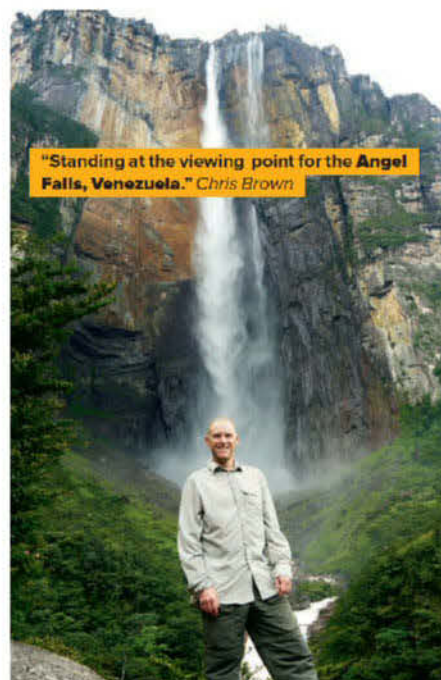


■ Readers' Pictures

YOUR PHOTOS

Been somewhere beautiful? Done something amazing?

Email fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk – make us jealous!



"On the tip of the 'Troll's Tongue',
Trolltunga – Norway."

Trish Jasinski



"We took our Wanderlust to the summit of Mount Kinabalu while enjoying our honeymoon in Borneo."

Angela & Chris Lomas

Where does your Wanderlust take you?

Every month we ask 'Where does your Wanderlust take you?', giving you a chance to win a goody bag including an adaptable **Insect Shield Buff®** – a new travel accessory to protect you from sun, wind and bugs (RRP £21). But can you do better than Angela & Chris (above)? We want to see where your Wanderlust takes you and where you take your Wanderlust!

Take your magazine with you on your next trip and share a pic with us. Post it on our Facebook wall, tweet it to us at @wanderlustmag or email it to fromtheroad@wanderlust.co.uk.



"Western Mongolia was an altogether different trip – astounding scenery and experience. The vulture was as big as me (and nearly as heavy!). Taken just outside Ulan Bator."

Barbara Mason



"On Maya Bay, Thailand – where *The Beach* was filmed."

Charlotte Kelly

12 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW THIS MONTH...

Your November essentials: the experts' tips for 2015; celebrate Thanksgiving with pumpkin pie; Humble's clean beaches; go with the guides...

1 ■ Bad habits exposed It's quite easy to be a terrible traveller

We've seen the headlines: outlandish travellers upsetting locals but, as we found out, causing offence on your trip can be easier than you think...

Three Italian tourists gallivanting naked around the streets of Barcelona last month didn't come as a welcome sight for the Catalan locals. When photos of the bare-bottomed men gathered attention on social media, hundreds of fed-up residents took to the streets in protest.

This year it seems incidents involving outrageous tourists have been making the news with increasing frequency; for example, back in March, the Peruvian

Government had to issue a warning condemning nudity atop Machu Picchu after a trend of posing for naked photos in front of the Inca settlement emerged.

While we may laugh at the headlines of these extreme cases, there are plenty of other, less obvious ways to be a 'bad' traveller, the most common being the embarrassing moment when you commit a cultural faux pas – even the most responsible traveller can make a mistake.

"Certain behaviours or actions that you're used to back home may be culturally insensitive or frowned upon in some parts of the world," says Simon Pickup,

sustainable tourism manager of the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA).

"For example being inappropriately dressed, touching someone's head, not finishing all the food on your plate at meal times and blowing your nose are all practices that have been known to cause offence in certain parts of the world but which we wouldn't necessarily find offensive back home."

'Even the most responsible traveller can make a cultural faux pas'

Common mistakes include not leaving enough tip (or, conversely leaving a tip when it's not part of the culture), being dressed inappropriately and taking photos in culturally sensitive locations. Even the most caring, intelligent and curious travellers can come unstuck.

"A friend of mine who was travelling through Burma committed a terrible faux pas completely by accident," recalls Simon. "While sat on a ground floor hotel room balcony with his travelling companion, he raised his foot to check out an insect bite on his ankle and in doing so, accidentally bore the sole of his foot to a local Burmese person who was walking towards the balcony. They were apparently horrified. As it turns out, feet are considered unclean in



Burma and as such, it's considered offensive to bear the soles of your feet in public."

To avoid these cringe-worthy moments Simon advises travellers to check out the FCO Know Before You Go website, to brush up on traditions or cultural norms and discover what to avoid on your journey.

Of course – everyone makes mistakes at some point. Someone who knows this all too well is Adrian Phillips, co-editor of *The Irresponsible Traveller* (Bradt, 2014), which



The bare cheek
It's safe to assume that
doing this will offend
someone somewhere

■ The Nitty Gritty

Six easy faux pas for travellers to make

- 1. Sitting in the back of a cab.** Piling into the back of a black cab is commonplace in the UK, but opting for the back seat in Oz or New Zealand will leave the driver thinking you're 'too good' to share the journey with him. Ride shotgun!
- 2. Using the wrong gesture.** Giving someone a thumbs up in much of the Middle East and Asia is often the insulting equivalent of flipping the bird and in Turkey, the age-old game of 'got your nose!' has very different connotations as the gesture of a thumb tucked into the fist poking under the index finger is taken aggressively and is highly offensive.
- 3. Offering to split the bill.** Though perfectly acceptable to share the bill evenly in the UK, the French find this behaviour impolite and believe you should either pay all, or none of it.
- 4. Baring your soles.** Across Asia, India and the Middle East, the soles of your feet are widely regarded as the most unclean part of the body, and to point them is disrespectful in Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist culture.
- 5. Clearing your plate.** In Chinese custom, leaving an empty dinner plate cheekily implies that the host had not courteously served you enough.
- 6. Wearing it wrong.** One of the most common faux pas to commit in Japan is doing up your yukata or kimono the wrong way. The correct way is left over right – the other way is how you dress a body for a funeral!

■ Online reader poll
Have you ever committed a cultural faux pas on your travels?



charts the times when even travel experts get things wrong. "Faux pas means 'mis-step', and if you travel adventurously it's absolutely inevitable you'll make a mis-step or two along the way," says Adrian.

"However many books you read in advance, you can't know every nuance of a new place and its culture; travelling is all about learning on the job! And your hosts will be fully aware of this. You'll generally find them gracious, helpful, and amused

rather than offended when you make a faux pas. So travel bravely and inquisitively, and accept that when you fall flat on your face – as you certainly will – the worst you're likely to suffer is a bruised ego."

So while it may seem obvious that wandering around sans clothes is not often appreciated, when there are so many other easy ways to accidentally cause offence – is there really such thing as a perfect traveller? Probably not...

New Routes

GO NOW...



Illuminating
Eindhoven is home to the Evoluon centre, built by the Philips lightbulb people

2 Enter the portal to northern Europe

Why go?

Eindhoven is maybe best known for its football club, PSV, but this pretty Dutch city offers more than soccer. It provides a nifty gateway to northern Europe – think return rail journeys to Bruges or Hamburg from just £30! And, with Ryanair's new budget flights, getting to Eindhoven from the UK is even cheaper.

Eindhoven also offers access to the Netherlands' southern provinces of Noord-Brabant

and Limburg. Visit Roermond and nearby De Meinweg NP – undulating forest and heath, grazed by Highland cattle and Icelandic ponies – or try cosmopolitan Maastricht, with its abundant art and culture.

For those wanting a lively city vibe, Amsterdam and Rotterdam are both a 90-minute train-ride away, which costs less than €20.

It is certainly worth lingering in Eindhoven before exploring further afield. Stadswandelpark offers city centre greenery –

ancient sycamores, sun-tinged lawns and the Dommel River – while culture aficionados can see Picasso's works at the Van Abbemuseum, or examine 100-year-old light bulbs at the first Philips factory.



Where to stay?

Just ten minutes from Eindhoven Station is the modern two-room Hof B&B (+31 6 4611 7741, freek@fmff.nl), right in the heart of town. Doubles from €85 (£67).



Get there now!

Ryanair will fly Manchester-Eindhoven four times a week from 26 October, £19.99 each way. See www.ryanair.com.



Or how about these...

From October, Wizz Air will operate three new routes between the UK and Poland: Katowice-Glasgow; Szczecin-London Luton; and Poznan-Glasgow. See www.wizzair.com.

Travel Gear

3 BUY THIS... Nalgene Travel Kit & Case £17, firstascent.co.uk



Hate those environmentally unfriendly plastic bags you have to put liquids in at airport security? Nalgene has an alternative. This nifty kit

features six size-approved, reusable, leak-proof containers that you can fill pre-trip, and a sturdy, clear case with a leak-proof zip to stow them in. Shampoo explosions, you're a thing of the past!

Film

4 WATCH THIS... Life Story BBC1, date TBC



This six-part Natural History Unit series, narrated by David Attenborough, follows a range of animals from birth, through development to courtship. It is extraordinary, powerfully emotional stuff, and includes eye-opening footage of animal behaviours never previously caught on film – all shot in ultra high definition. Unmissable.

Luggage

5 PACK THIS... Pacsafe Venturesafe 15L Gill Day Pack £90, pacsafe.com



Famed for its anti-theft rucksack covers, Pacsafe now offers more subtle secure luggage. This normal-looking pack boasts lots of anti-theft features: slash-proof straps, mesh-protected external pockets, RFID microchips, zips that lock together and lockable strap hooks. Your stuff can be safe without screaming: "I'm valuable!"



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World Food

EAT THIS...



6

Be thankful for pie

The two most quintessentially American holidays are Independence Day and Thanksgiving. While 4 July is epitomised by fireworks, parties and parades, the comparatively sedate Thanksgiving is defined by food.

Thanksgiving festivities take place on the fourth Thursday in November (27 Nov 2014) and revolve around three things: being thankful for what you have, gathering with family and friends, and lots of eating. No Thanksgiving is complete without a succulent roast turkey, doused in sweet cranberry sauce.

The 'First Thanksgiving' took place in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in autumn 1621. Following a successful growing season, English pilgrims gathered with Wampanoag Indians for a huge three-day feast – blending Native American and Puritan customs.

Historians reckon the two groups likely dined on fowl such as duck, five deer (a Native American Indian custom), shellfish, plums, melons, cranberries, pumpkin and – quite possibly – wild turkey. Although the modern-day menu differs from the original fare (there would have been no mashed potato or bread stuffing in 1621), the holiday's essence remains the same: giving thanks and sharing with others.

Pumpkin pie is now a Thanksgiving staple. The squash was originally baked whole and stuffed with apples, spices and sugar. As French pie recipes made it over to the New World from the beginning of the 19th century, it started to be served in pastry-crust form, often with heaps of sugar and treacle. These days there are many variations, with ingredients such as ginger, praline and even chilli powder adding extra kick.

PUMPKIN PIE

Serves 8

2 cups pureed pumpkin
30g softened cream cheese
30ml treacle
100g granulated sugar
45g brown sugar
1½ tsp cinnamon
1 tsp nutmeg
1 tsp ground ginger
½ tsp ground cloves
3 eggs, slightly beaten
350ml single cream
23cm unbaked pie base

Method

1. Preheat oven to 220°C.
2. Whisk together the pumpkin, cream cheese and treacle until mixed and smooth. Whisk in the sugars and spices. Whisk in the eggs and single cream, stirring until well blended.
3. Pour pumpkin mixture into unbaked pie crust. Spread evenly and bake for 10 minutes.
4. Reduce temperature to 180°C and bake until a knife inserted into the centre comes out clean (about 40-50 minutes).
5. Leave to cool on a rack until room temperature. Garnish with whipped cream if desired.

TOP TIP

Use fresh rather than dried spices to add zing to your pumpkin pie. Cinnamon, ginger and cloves are all key, but the secret is using freshly grated nutmeg.

Recipe from Discover America: Great American Food Stories. The cookbook can be downloaded for free from now. Go to: www.discoveramerica.com/foodstories



CHOOSE THE PATH LESS TAKEN

The world is vast. Opportunities are boundless. Holiday time is precious. Let us guide you as we walk together off the beaten track.

Ramblers Worldwide Holidays are all about new paths in new places, in the company of new friends.

Wherever you choose to walk, you'll experience our extra special touches that keep us one step ahead of the rest. Our walking experts lead the way for adventurers in search of new experiences. Thanks to our unrivalled knowledge, extensive research and respected reputation in every location, you'll see the lesser known side of popular destinations. And you will share their best kept secrets. Your leader will look after you every step of the way, helping you create unforgettable memories in unbeatable places across every new mile you cover.

FLEXIBLE AND FRIENDLY

You can walk as much or as little as you like in the company of small intimate groups

who share your passion for discovery and a mutual respect for the great outdoors. Our clients tell us that the friendships formed on Ramblers Worldwide Holidays often grow into something as unique as the holidays themselves.

NEW PATHS TO DISCOVER

You can be bold with Ramblers Worldwide Holidays. Be the first to take fresh steps on new paths with 37 new holidays for 2015, spanning 30 different destinations. From Gozo to Bolivia, Montenegro to New Mexico, request our new brochure to find out more.

REWARDING FOR EVERYONE

The more you walk with us, the better we get to know you and the more we can offer you. Find out more about our loyalty rewards and local walking group partnership online.

Others have tried to copy but never captured the essence of Ramblers Worldwide Holidays. We are the original walking specialists and we look forward to seeing you soon on the path less taken.

For expert advice, rewards, added benefits and a new 2015 brochure, go online or call

01707 386690

www.ramblersholidays.co.uk



7 ■ Five minutes with... HUMBLE'S COASTAL CLEAR-UP

Can you believe, Kate Humble's been on our TVs for 20 years, fronting everything from *Countryfile* to *Volcano Live*? But her latest role is a bit different: ambassador for Britain's beaches. We caught up with her to talk travel, packing for a trip and guides...

We didn't see you as a beach person!

I don't tend to go on beach holidays, but I do spend a lot of time in coastal environments. I don't think it is overstating it to say that, here in the UK, we have an embarrassment of riches as far as our coast and our marine wildlife is concerned. I'm going to big up south Wales – the Gower Peninsula is unbeatable really.

People seem to forget that beaches are the richest and most diverse of natural habitats and that's why I wanted to be an ambassador for the Barefoot Wine Beach Rescue Project. People think that if you dump litter in the sea or on a beach it's going to conveniently disappear, but that isn't the case. Plastic litter hangs around for thousands of years and it causes untold damage.

How do you approach travel when you're not working?

I still love it. I look for the unfamiliar. I love going to places where I feel like an explorer.

For me, travelling is being able to feel like you can have an immersive experience with local people. Public transport is brilliant for that. You go on African minibuses – instantly you will be in conversation and find out stuff that you wouldn't find out if you were on an official tour. That's what inspires me to travel – a tremendous curiosity about other people and how they live.

What was your first travel experience?

I've always been quite restless. My mum said that when I was three I disappeared and they found me a mile down the road with my wheelbarrow; apparently I said I was going on an adventure!

The first trip I did on my own and away from the UK was Eurorailing when I was 17. I worked for months to save up for my ticket,

so that my parents couldn't tell me I couldn't go. I didn't even have a passport; I had to get one of those emergency passports from the Post Office. I had £100 spending money to last me the month, so I ate a lot of baguettes and slept at a lot of railway stations.

When you're planning a journey, how do you prepare? What's the first thing that goes in the suitcase?

Never a suitcase: backpack or duffel bag. I'll always take a pocket knife, and a really good pair of boots – I'm a KEEN fanatic. I'll always have a map. I love reading; there's something absolutely lovely about tucking yourself up in your tent, in the middle of nowhere, no distractions, with a head torch and reading.

'Aged three I disappeared. They found me a mile down the road; I said I was going on an adventure!'

We've just announced our World Guide Award winners (p104) – when you were in judge (in 2011) what did you look for in a award-winning guide?

Taking a big trip isn't something that everybody can do every year – sometimes a trip really is a holiday of a lifetime. I looked for the testimonials that said: this person tuned into their clients, understood what was really going to excite them, and went that extra mile to give them an experience they'll never forget.

For the full interview see wanderlust.co.uk/151. Kate is leading the 2014 Barefoot Wine Beach Rescue Project, to keep Britain's beaches barefoot-friendly www.barefootwine.co.uk



8 ■ What's On UK EVENTS

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

London, 24 Oct 2014-30 Aug 2015

www.nhm.ac.uk

Natural History Museum.

10am-5.50pm; £12.60.

Now in its 50th year, this competition continues to showcase the very best nature photography.

ANDY CAVE LECTURE

London, 6 Nov

www.portersprogressuk.org

RGS, Kensington. 7pm; £15.

Hear the inspirational story of how Andy Cave became a world-class mountaineer and expedition leader.

QUEEN'S GALLERY EXHIBITIONS

London, 7 Nov 2014-22 Feb 2015

www.royalcollection.org.uk

Buckingham Palace. 10am-5.30pm; from £9.50.

Check out two new exhibitions: *Cairo to Constantinople: Early Photographs of the Middle East* – the work of Francis Bedford – and *Gold*.

EXPLORE 2014

London, 14-16 Nov

www.rgs.org/explore

RGS, Kensington. Sat & Sun ticket

from £85; Sat or Sun ticket £55.

Planning an expedition? Meet speakers, researchers and explorers.

KENDAL MOUNTAIN FESTIVAL

Kendal, Lake District, 20-23 Nov

www.mountainfest.co.uk

Enjoy four days of award-winning films and inspiring talks from adventurers. Plus sign up for the brand new travel writing workshops with our editor Phoebe Smith and a panel of special guests.

FIRST ON THE CONTINENTS

London, 27 Nov

www.portersprogressuk.org

RGS, Kensington. 10.30am-9pm;

£30 (£20 evening only).

Community Action Nepal and the RGS are celebrating climbing across all the continents.

DESTINATIONS 2015

15-18 Jan, 29 Jan-1 Feb 2015

www.destinationsshow.com

Olympia London, Manchester

EventCity; 10am-5.30pm; £11.

Save the date! The chance to discover new destinations is nearly here...

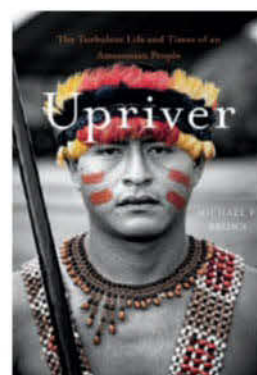
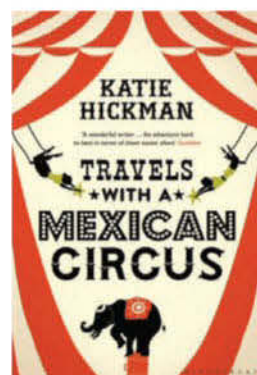
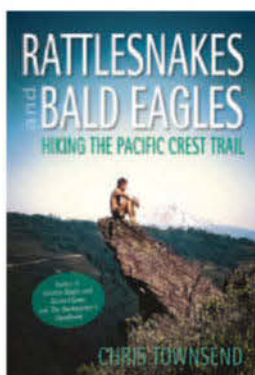
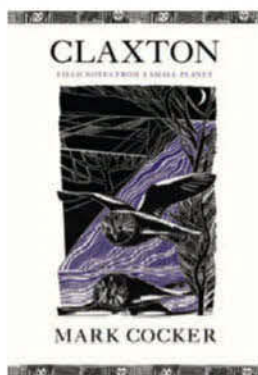
ADVENTURE TRAVEL SHOW

London, 17-18 Jan 2015

www.adventureshow.com

Olympia London; from £8.

Plan a trip of a lifetime – plus sign up for a travel photography or writing workshop – nine to choose from!



■ Read this...

9 Browse classics, old and new

This month's books include re-printed favourites and classics-in-waiting

With devolution recently on the British brain, Matthew Engel's three-year project of visiting each of England's 39 counties, and London too, has turned out to be quite timely. Covering big places and comically small personalities, the 40 chapters that make up *Engel's England* (Profile, £20) end up being short, fun, wry character sketches.

Mark Cocker gives Norfolk the full oil painting. *Claxton* (Jonathan Cape, £15) distills a decade of diaries into a year-long day-by-day exploration of the nature around the titular village. It's as satisfyingly poetic as it is poetically satisfying.

The scenery is a little wilder on the 4,264km Pacific Crest Trail, even if the writing is more matter-of-fact – but then sentimentality is likely to get you killed here, if *Rattlesnakes and Bald Eagles* (Sandstone Press, £20) is anything to go by. Chris Townsend recounts his 1982 journey across the US from the Mexican border to Canada, a rugged hike of bears, altitude and attitude.

Katie Hickman stayed south of the border for her *Travels with a Mexican Circus* (Bloomsbury, £9), republished in 2014 to

celebrate its 20th anniversary. Rich in characters, atmospherics and magic, it's a great insight into the psyche and culture of the performers and punters in the big top.

Enjoying a similarly intense experience in Latin America is Michael F Brown, who's spent nearly 40 years studying the Awajún of the Peruvian Amazon. *Upriver: The Turbulent Life And Times of an Amazonian People* (Harvard Uni Press, £23) is not only a revealing portrait of a people coming to terms with the modern world, but also of the changing face of anthropology itself.

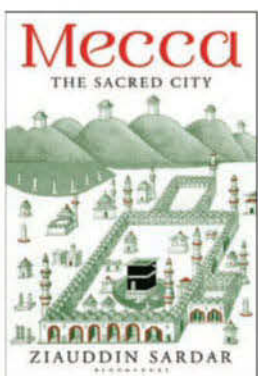
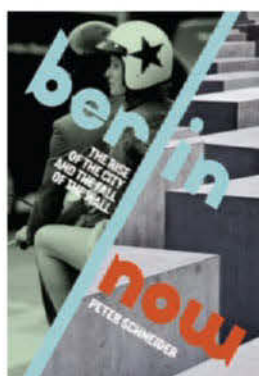
Two big destinations get the biography treatment. Peter Schneider's *Berlin Now* (Penguin, £10) is a rise-and-wall-fall document of one of Europe's top cities and is as rich, vibrant and snappy as its subject. More sober if no less readable is Ziauddin Sardar's hefty biog, *Mecca* (Bloomsbury, £25). It charts the bloody, complex history and changing politics of one of the world's biggest travel hubs: the annual Hajj draws more than three million Muslim pilgrims here.

Freya Stark's visit to Mecca is one of the trips recounted in *The Zodiac Arch* (IB Tauris, £10), which takes in 50 years' worth

of thoughtful essays from the Mistress Of The Middle East. Another Tauris classic re-release is *News From Tartary: Peking to Kashmir* (£13), Peter Fleming's account of his 5,600km journey at the end of the Great Game; it contains as much adventure and Empirical snark as one of his bro's 007 tales.

A couple of arty alternatives for your guidebook shelf: Museyon Guides, which has built up a fun collection of mostly pop-culture guides, offers a fresh take on Tokyo, Kyoto and Tohoku: Sumiko Kajiyama's *Cool Japan* (£16) bustles with local history, context and hidden spots. Meanwhile Granta releases its latest City Secrets guide – *City Secrets: Paris* (£13), a compendium of idiosyncratic advice from a trendy bar's worth of bearded creative types.

With not a single Scottish ramble inside, it initially looks like *Great British Walks* (National Trust, £13) fired the independence gun too early; but actually, the NT has a separate body north of the border. The narrower focus means more ideas beyond the usual, though – the ideal start point for those looking to do a little local exploring. We'll grab our boots.



10

Travel secrets

2015 TRAVEL TIP-OFFS CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET?

We asked *Wanderlust's* regular contributors for their top travel tips for the new year. Here are our (reluctantly surrendered) faves – just don't tell anyone!



THE HIDDEN TEMPLE NEPAL DR JANE WILSON-HOWARTH

Head out of congested Kathmandu to one of the many temple complexes in the valley. My favourite is Vajrayogini, a climb up stone steps from medieval Sankhu village. The 17th-century temple is set among mature trees; butterflies and rhesus monkeys drink at the fountains; the Newar carvings are superb. It is a tranquil corner, great for people-watching.
Get there: London-Kathmandu, via Delhi, from £570rtn (airindia.in); flight time from 12.5hrs.



THE UNDERRATED ARCHIPELAGO SCOTLAND MARK STRATTON

Regardless of Scotland's independence referendum, the Uist Islands of the Outer Hebrides feel like a foreign country – not least because you'll hear softly spoken Gaelic throughout. Even more surprising is a string of the

world's most perfect beaches. Miles of deserted white-sand shores, lapped by truly turquoise seas and watched over by colonies of seals, fringe the Uists' western coast. The best way to explore is by bicycle, wild camping as you go.

Get there: Glasgow-Stornoway from £125rtn (flybe.com); flight time 1hr. Caledonian MacBrayne ferries serve Uist (calmac.co.uk).



THE NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD MIAMI, USA SARAH GILBERT

Wynwood, one of Miami's most run-down neighbourhoods, has reinvented itself as an art destination, and disused warehouses have been transformed into more than 70 art spaces and eclectic eateries. It's also home to the world's largest open-air street-art museum, with work from globally renowned artists sitting on top of what was once a rubbish dump.

Get there: London-Miami from £540rtn (virgin-atlantic.com); flight time from 9hrs.



THE EVEN-BETTER AURORA ARCTIC CIRCLE WILLIAM GRAY

NASA announced in June 2014 that the sun's polarity had finally flipped and we were beyond the peak of the current solar cycle. But rather than signalling the end of northern lights activity, this means we're only halfway through. In fact, the Solar Cycle Prediction Panel is even suggesting that intense aurora activity is more likely to occur as a solar cycle starts to decline. So, if you haven't yet seen the northern lights, the 2014/15 season could be your best chance yet.

Get there: Download *The Northern Lights Travel Guide* (<http://tinyurl.com/oqvuggy>) for advice.



THE TOP TRAIL BALKANS MARTIN SYMINGTON

If highlights can be measured in heartbeats then my top discovery is the 'Peaks of the Balkans' long-distance trekking trail. Linked



paths scale glaciated ridges and meander through ghostly forests foraged by wolves as they weave over unmanned borders between Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania. Along the way I was welcomed with food and shelter at simple guesthouses; these were run by participants in this new project, pioneered in peaceful cooperation by communities recently riven by shocking conflicts.

Get there: London-Podgorica, Montenegro, from £40rtn (ryanair.com); flight time 3hrs.



THE ALTERNATIVE CARIBBEAN HAITI PHOEBE SMITH

The intoxicating beat of vodou drums, the banter and vibrant colours in the bustling markets, the smell of Barbancourt rum at the bar of the legendary Oloffson Hotel – Haiti overwhelms the senses from the minute you land. And it doesn't end there. Beyond the capital are secluded sandy coves, old forts and a network of walking trails over lush mountains. Forget anything you think you know about the Caribbean – Haiti is the real deal. Go now before everyone else discovers it!

Get there: See our *Pocket Guide* to your first 24 hours in Port-au-Prince (p133).



THE TOUR FOR THE BRAVE DELHI, INDIA NICK BOULOS

Cycling around Delhi may seem foolhardy – suicidal, even – but touring India's chaotic capital on two wheels is not only greatly thrilling but also surprisingly safe (yes, really!). Guided rides through the markets, forts and narrow alleys of Old Delhi leave just after dawn as the city slowly begins to stir. Just watch out for the cars, buses, rickshaws, goats and cows!

Get there: London-Delhi from £517rtn (airindia.in). Book with Delhi By Cycle (delhibycycle.com).



THE SLOW REDISCOVERY PATAGONIA CHRIS MOSS

The more I travel, the more I feel being counter-consumerist enriches the experience. Instead of moving fast, ticking off sights, and paying for flash hotels, I'll do the opposite. In 2015 I'll return to Patagonia (pictured above), to camp wild, cook over a fire, avoid driving, slow down and see the small details. New travel writing points in this direction, as writers celebrate ignored moorlands, lost paths and post-industrial wastes.

Get there: London-Buenos Aires from £750rtn (ba.com); flight time 13.5hrs. Fly on to El Calafate with Aerolíneas Argentinas (aerolineas.com.ar).



THE SURPRISING STATE TEXAS, USA ALASTAIR HUMPHREYS

My favourite recent discovery is Texas. I went there with preconceptions of scrubby desert, big hats and rednecks. After all the travelling I've done I should have learned by now not to judge places in advance. But Texas really did surprise me. I ran through leafy woodland that looked like Kent (except for the snakes). I swam in beautiful rivers. Big Bend National Park impressed me more than the Grand Canyon. And I ate. Oh, boy, did I eat! If you're a carnivore I challenge you to find a better barbecue on earth. Extraordinary food, the quirky delights of Austin and a lovely southern friendliness: yes, Texas – I'll be back.

Get there: London-Houston from £550rtn (ba.com); flight time from 10hrs.



THE FORGOTTEN FESTIVAL UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA DAVID ABRAM

More than 100 whitewashed Hindu temples crowd the waterfront at Bateshwar, a forgotten pilgrimage complex on the banks of the Yamuna River. Each year in late-October/November, the surrounding fields host one of India's largest livestock fairs, when thousands of camels, cows and horses change hands. The following week, streams of worshippers descend to take an auspicious dip in the river during a holy bathing festival. Despite being only an hour's drive from Agra, it's not in any guidebooks.

Get there: London-Delhi from £517rtn (airindia.in); flight time from 8.5hrs.



THE LOCALS' ROCKIES CANADA SARAH BAXTER

Banff and Jasper National Parks ensaddle epic mountains, lakes a-plenty and many moose and bears. But Kananaskis Country, south-east of Banff, is where many Albertans choose to roam. It has trails for all seasons, backcountry campsites, First Nations history and lots of wildlife (not least a golden eagle migration in October), but fewer foreign tourists. Canmore is the closest hub (with a more local-feel than Banff); fuel up on lamb lollipops at Tapas (tapascanmore.ca).

Get there: London-Calgary from £527rtn (airtransat.co.uk); flight time 9.5hrs.

Instant Expert

KNOW YOUR... FÊTE GEDE

Spirited away
A vodou ceremony
taking place at
Port-au-Prince



11

Discover the spooky Haitian celebration of Fête Gede – the vodou-tinged Day of the Dead festival you didn't know about...

Day of the Dead? I thought that was a Mexican thing?

Most famously, it is. But there are variants all over, from Japan's Bon Festival to Korean Chuseok. Here, we're talking about the Haitian Fête Gede (Festival of Spirits).

Where?

Haiti shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic. But while the latter has become a haven for tourists, Haiti is the Caribbean at its most offbeat. Most travellers have never heard of the festival, leaving the celebrations virtually tourist-free. For now.

So what's different about Fête Gede?

Expect things to get hotter than a habañero! As with the Day of the Dead, locals bring out candles, flowers and food to appease the

deceased. But Fête Gede revellers will also dance (often naked) beneath the stars, high on chilli-laced rum and rubbing their bodies with the brown liquor as if possessed by vodou spirits.

When should I go?

The celebration takes place throughout November, but peaks at the beginning of the month. On 1 November, thousands converge on the National Cemetery of Port-au-Prince to pay homage to Baron Samedi, father of the *gede* (the spirits of Haitian vodou) and the spirit of sex, death and resurrection.

What else can I do in Haiti?

Lots! First, check out our *First 24 Hours* guide to the capital city of Port-au-Prince (p133). Once you've explored the city and its head-spinning markets and nightlife, head further afield to the south-east. Take a hike

to Bassin Bleu where you can cool off in the clear water or go visit an artist's studio in nearby Jacmel.

Haiti is great for getting out into nature, and birdwatching too – the country is home to 29 endemic species, including the Hispaniolan parakeet and the greater Antillean nightjar.

Lastly, be sure to try Haitian rum, for medicinal purposes of course...

Anything else I should know before I go?

The security situation in Haiti is unpredictable – if you live in the UK, check the latest Foreign & Commonwealth Office advice before travelling (fco.gov.uk). Also, visit a travel health clinic to make sure you're up-to-date on all your jabs.

For more information on the country, see www.haititourisme.org (in French), of the brilliant Bradt guide – *Haiti* (2012).

TRAVEL EXPERIENCED



FACE TO FACE WITH UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan is the very centre of ex-soviet Central Asia.

Set on the Silk Road, it has played host to waves of conquerors and nomads. The rich architectural inheritance of Uzbekistan is endowed with some of the most audacious buildings in the Islamic world.

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12 TRAVEL WITH A TOP GUIDE

Be Inspired



A guide can make or break a trip – and usually there's no telling who you're going to get, or how good they will be. That is, unless you travel with one of the eight shortlisted *Wanderlust* World Guide Awards 2014 nominees. These inspirational individuals are some of the very best on the planet, leading a range of adventures – from hiking amid Greenland's icebergs to spotting the Big Five in Tanzania. Find out about this year's finalists on p104, then start trip planning...

PICKY TRAVELLER

Know when you want to travel but don't know where? Got an activity you long to try but not sure how? Try *Wanderlust's* Trip Finder: mytripfinder.co.uk

1. Greenland

Stroll through mountains and icebergs

Explore the icy isle on foot on **Discover The World's Hiking in East Greenland** adventure. Regional expert Cathy Harlow will guide treks past magnificent icebergs, into indigo fjords, through colourful valleys and beneath snowcapped granite mountains. You will also learn how the local people survive in such an isolated place. When your legs tire, hop into a helicopter and take a boat cruise for a different view.

Who: Discover The World (01737 214250, discover-the-world.co.uk)

When: 3 Jul 2015 (TBC)

How long: 6 or 9 nights

How much: from £1,635 (excl flights)

2. Cambodia

Go local

Admire the splendour of Angkor Wat, float down the Mekong River to spot Irrawaddy dolphins and stroll through the streets of colonial Phnom Penh and Battambang on **G Adventures' Ultimate Cambodian Adventure**. Bunyong 'Bun' Roern can't wait to show you around his homeland and teach you about its history. See for yourself the difference travel can make to small communities when eating a traditional Cambodian meal.

Who: G Adventures (0344 272 2040, gadventures.co.uk)

When: 14 Feb 2015

How long: 14 days

How much: from £899 (excl flights)

3. India

Cross the highest driveable pass

Great guide Suryaveer Singh Chundawat heads up **Wild Frontiers' India: High Road to Kashmir** trip. Immerse yourself in rich Buddhist culture in Ladakh and explore ancient monasteries, palaces and forts. Cross into Kashmir by taking an unforgettable mountain journey along the world's highest driveable pass, through the Himalaya.

Who: Wild Frontiers (020 7736 3968, wildfrontierstravel.com)

When: 23 May 2015

How long: 15 days

How much: from £2,395 (excl flights)

4. France

Take a sip in wine country

Raise a glass with guide Charlie Jaques. **Back-Roads Touring's Champagne, Burgundy & the Rhone Valley** trip journeys through France's greatest grape-growing regions, indulging in its rich history and wines. Visit Chablis for white wine tasting, admire the charming Rhone Valley and explore the picturesque Beaune vineyards on foot. Also take a behind-the-scenes vineyard tour. *Salut!*

Who: Back-Roads Touring (020 8987 0990, backroadstouring.com)

When: 10 & 31 May, 21 Jun, 12 Jul, 2 & 23 Aug, 13 & 27 Sept 2015 (call on booking to confirm dates led by Charlie)

How long: 7 days

How much: from £1,735 (incl flights)

5. Central America

Travel high and low

Tramp through rainforests, across volatile volcanoes and into Mayan ruins on **Journey Latin America's Alción: Central America Discovery**. Led by Daniele Binaghi, you'll venture through six countries in 22 days, heading off the beaten track in Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. Discover the historic Panama Canal, look for capuchin monkeys in the Monteverde Cloud Forest, walk the cobbled streets of Suchitoto, and more.

Who: Journey Latin America (020 3432 1539, journeylatinamerica.co.uk)

When: 24 Jan 2015

How long: 22 days

How much: from £2,788 (incl flights)

6. India

See the subcontinent, stomach first

Dheeraj 'Monty' Bhatt leads you through India's greatest cities on a journey of foodie discovery for **Intrepid's Real Food Adventure: India** trip. Travel through Delhi, Jodhpur and Udaipur tasting local dishes and having a go at cooking them yourself. There's also time to visit Jaipur's Palace of the Wind, relax on Goa's beaches and enjoy rural Rajasthan.

Who: Intrepid (0808 274 5111, intrepidtravel.com)

When: Frequent, Nov 2014-Apr 2015 (call to confirm which tours Monty is leading)

How long: 14 days

How much: from £1,260 (excl flights)

7. Tanzania

Camp in the Serengeti

Have an unforgettable trip at Namiri Plains Camp in the company of **Asilia Africa** guide, Lewis Mangaba. It is a remote, flourishing, unspoilt corner of the Serengeti; designated a Wilderness Zone 20 years ago to preserve its wildlife, and only opened in July 2014.

The game here is thriving – especially cheetahs – and from early November to April, the wildebeest migration appears.

Who: Asilia Africa (+27 21 418 0468, asiliaafrica.com)

When: Year round, excl Apr-May (Lewis moves camps; call to check availability)

How long: Book by the night

How much: from £406 pppn (excl flights)

8. Peru

Explore Inca ruins

Amazonas Explorer offers *The Ultimate Inca Trail*. It includes a series of acclimatisation hikes in Cusco and the Sacred Valley before guide Efrain Valles leads a five-day trek along the Inca Trail. The longer-than-usual hike allows more time to catch your breath, fully explore all the ruins and appreciate the enchanting views. The trip is tailored to arrive at Machu Picchu after the crowds have dispersed and includes a full guided tour.

Who: Amazonas Explorer (+51 (0) 84 252846, amazonas-explorer.com)

When: Every Sat, late Mar-Nov (Efrain does alternate weeks; confirm on booking)

How long: 9 days

How much: from £1,160 (excl flights)



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Nunavik, Canada

BEYOND THE END OF THE ROAD

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WORDS **PHOEBE SMITH** PHOTOGRAPHS **NEIL S PRICE**





Sunlight caught the metal trigger of the gun, blinding me for a second. “Don’t worry,” said the pilot, as he saw me eye the firearm, “I’d fly away before I’d use it.” I looked around at the remote shingle beach on which we were standing. Here we were, high in the Canadian Arctic, on an island inhabited by at least 50 polar bears, 70km from the nearest landmass, and the pilot of the only chartered plane hereabouts had just said that he’d desert us if the bears got too close. I gulped, hard.

“We’d definitely come back for you though,” he shouted as I followed my guide Allen Gordon along the shore of Akpatok Island. Thankfully we weren’t on land for long. A waiting Zodiac took us out to a small catamaran, from which we began our – safer – search for bears.

The sea was so still that our wake felt like an intrusion. Icebergs rose from the turquoise water like frozen turrets and, above, black guillemots called out into the sky. We trained our binoculars on the island’s fort-like limestone cliffs, scanning for anything white. Excitement bubbled a few times when someone spotted a buoy or a large rock, but soon the salty air became too much and we left the deck to have lunch and commiserate with each other on our lack of wildlife sightings.

Not that I could complain. In the past few days I’d enjoyed not one but three close encounters, any one of which you’d count yourself lucky to see in a lifetime.

The far, far north

Look at a map of Québec and at first it seems fairly digestible: there’s Montréal, with its French liberalism and high-rises; the wide St Lawrence River, which snakes through the province and out to sea

via a string of pretty villages; the cliff-side cobbles of quaint Québec City. But look north and you’ll see that’s only a fraction of the story.

The top third of the province, roughly twice the size of Britain, surrounded by water on three sides and stretching beyond the Arctic Circle, is Nunavik (not to be confused with the more well-known Nunavut to the north). It comprises just 14 villages, none of them connected by roads. Getting there is a challenge: if you drive north from Montréal, the road ends at Caniapiscaw Reservoir – still hundreds of kilometres shy of Kuujjuaq, Nunavik’s southernmost administrative centre and unofficial capital.

Kuujjuaq is where I’d begun my journey days earlier, courtesy of the one daily flight from Montréal. It was July, and with the ice temporarily melted, a barge had also just arrived, bringing fuel for the giant generators that provide power for the entire community.

“We’re reliant on bulk delivery now,” explained Allen, as he drove me around Kuujjuaq, the town where he was born and raised, as were his parents, grandparents and even great-grandparents. Evidence of human habitation in this area dates back 7,000 years but a European community, known as Fort Chimo, was first established in the 1830s by the Hudson Bay Company. In 1942 the US established an air base where Kuujjuaq airport sits now, and the town as it is today began to develop.

“I remember, in the 50s, people lived in houses made from shipping crates. In the 70s the ATV or snowmobile was the family car. Now it’s all pick-up trucks,” said Allen. In 1945 the US left the area but the community continued to develop, first with a church, then a hospital and finally a school. Allen was one of the first three students to graduate in Kuujjuaq.

“When I was a kid, the outdoors was our playground,” he recalled. “We’d ride our bikes outside the courthouse – that ▶

First chance to see

As Nunavik opens its doors to tourism, intrepid travellers will have the chance to spot caribou, check out village communities like Kangiqsujuaq (*below*) or spot polar bear and thick-billed murre on Akpatok Island (*left*)



Voices from the past

Two Kuujjuaq youths demonstrate traditional throat singing beneath the town's stone *inuksuk* – a landmark used by Inuit for navigation and to mark camps, hunting grounds or travel routes; (right) the meteor-created Pingualuit Crater, in northern Nunavik



◀ was the only smooth place in town. I used to know everyone but things have changed, now I only know about half.”

Things are still changing. We passed the Kuujjuaq Inn – the town’s second hotel, which was in the process of being extended due to demand. The most recent census puts the population at around 2,300, but due to the transient community of oil and mine workers – Kuujjuaq is rich in iron ore and minerals – and the odd tourist from ‘down south’ (aka the rest of Québec), Allen reckons it’s closer to 3,000.

“The landscape is changing all the time too,” said Allen. “Winter is much greener, spring comes earlier, winter is often delayed. Migrating caribou used to pass through town every year, but now you rarely see them. But times change – it’s a fact of life. Still, we don’t forget how things used to be.”

Caught in the throat

In Kuujjuaq teaching children where they come from is important. Pupils learn the native Inuktitut language first and then in Grade 2 (age 7) they choose either French or English – the former being the most popular. In addition, Inuit traditions are kept alive. That night two local teenagers came to Kuujjuaq’s only restaurant to demonstrate throat singing, which is enjoying a resurgence in popularity among the town’s youth.

Dressed in traditional *arnautik* tunics and classic *kamik* boots made from caribou fur (for warmth) and seal skin (for waterproofness),

the two girls explained their ancestors’ art: “Women used to do it to pass the time in igloos when crafting, cooking or settling the baby,” they explained. “It was a game; you’d sing facing a partner for rhythm and the first to stop would lose.”

The songs might be about everyday life, or composed to encourage sleddog teams, they explained: “Now we try to do more modern twists – one of us might sing in rap, the other may do beat-boxing.”

The girls turned to each other. One began with a guttural bass; the other added a higher pitched chirp. The sounds mimic those in the natural world – streams spluttering, birds calling. I was instantly lost in the tune, imagining Kuujjuaq without its modern trappings, just endless tundra covered in black spruce and larch. It was beautiful.

Marvellous meteors

I didn’t have to use my imagination the next day. An early flight saw me transported even further north to Kangiqsujuaq. In 1884 the Hudson Bay Company set up a trading post here, as in Kuujjuaq, and once more the village began to develop. Now it has a population of just over 600. Sitting on mussel-rich Wakeham Bay and surrounded by hulking mountains, it’s home to one hotel and a general store; many buildings are decorated with murals of village elders, whales and caribou, painted in bright, primary colours.

Kangiqsujuaq is also the gateway to Pingualuit National Park, and home to the park’s interpretation centre, opened in 2007. ▶

‘One singer began with a guttural bass; the other a higher pitched chirp. The sounds mimic the natural world – streams spluttering, birds calling. I was instantly lost in the tune’





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◀ This is where I met Pierre Philie, a French cultural geographer with a strong interest in anthropology, who reluctantly came to Nunavik on assignment 33 years ago, fell in love with the place – and a local woman – and never left. He talked about the wildlife found in the park, such as snowy owl, gyrfalcon, Arctic fox and grey wolf. And he showed me pictures of the early Inuit community, explaining that they never wasted anything. They went ice-fishing in winter and used the leftover skin to make bags; if they hunted caribou they ate the meat, dried any excess for later, made clothes from the hide and tools from the antlers and bones.

We headed to the airport. In Nunavik terms the park is close to Kangisujuaq but the only way to access it is by plane. We were heading for a short, bumpy landing strip, over a hundred kilometres away from anywhere or anyone – but not anything: we would be staying near Pingualuit Crater.

“People thought that the crater was caused by a volcano,” explained Pierre as the perfectly circular lake appeared from the otherwise endless russet permafrost below. The small plane noticeably tipped as everyone leaned over to catch a glimpse of this mysterious watery hole that the Inuit call the Crystal Eye. “If it had been volcanic there would have been valuable mineral deposits,” said Pierre, “but one scientist quickly quelled the speculation – and now it’s known that it is a meteor crater.

The meteor fell 1.4 million years ago. Its impact was 8,500 times stronger than the A-bomb dropped on Hiroshima.”

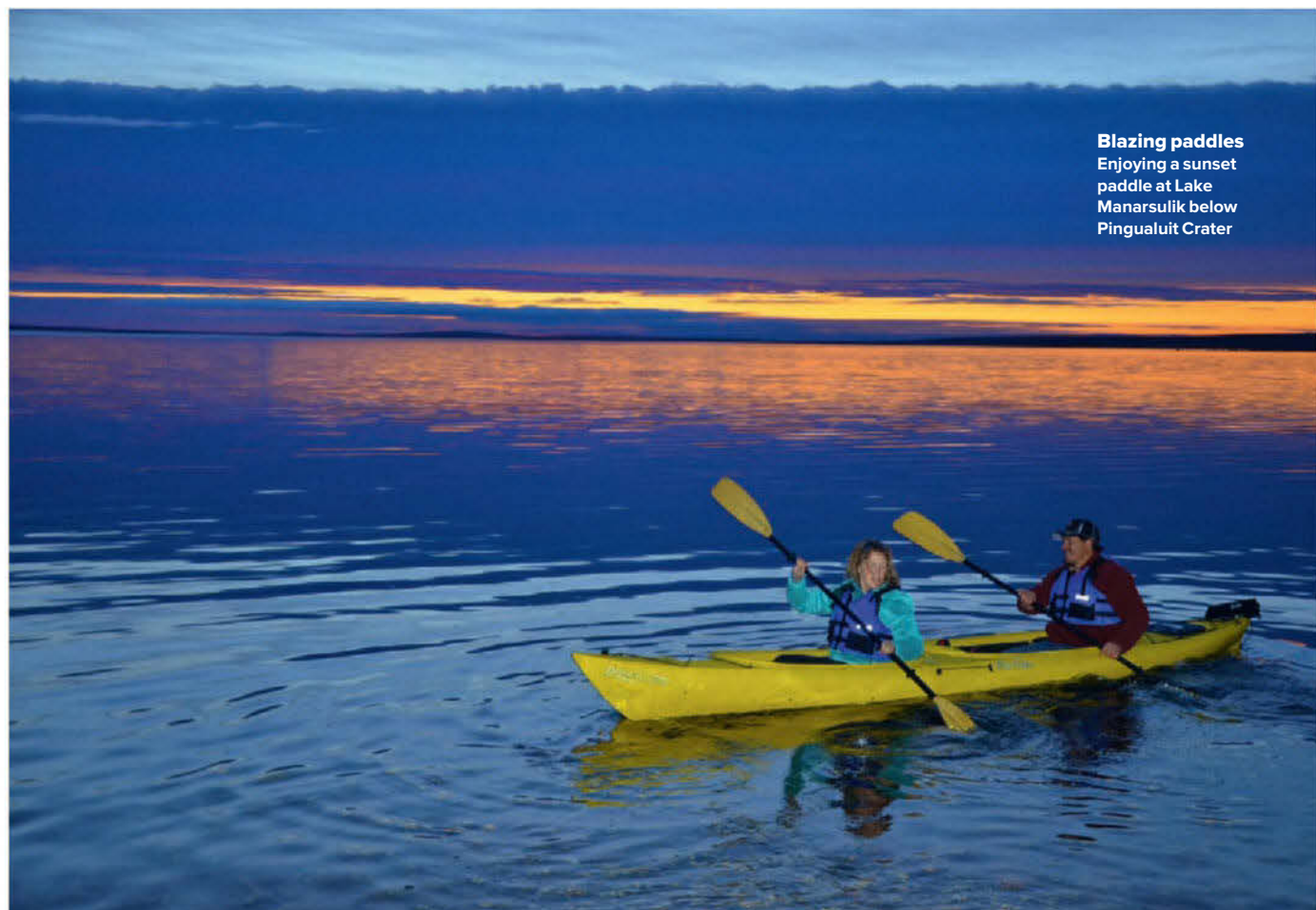
The giant crater disappeared as we came in to land. It was too late to walk up to it, so we spent the evening at the park’s cabins kayaking on nearby Lake Manarsulik, looking for rock ptarmigan and watching the sun flare scarlet as it sunk below the horizon.

The next morning we made our way over the tundra, an excited Pierre regaling us with tales of Pingualuit. He talked of the strange fish with unusually large heads that live in its lake (no one can decide how they got there); of the Second World War pilots who used it as a navigational tool; of the archaeological sites that remain undisturbed nearby. “The landscape is a living book – there is so much we can learn,” he exclaimed, picking up a rock that showed indentations made when the meteor crashed all that time ago.

The lake was huge; 3.4km in diameter, with a circumference of over 10km. Despite the sunshine, a thin layer of ice coated its surface like hardened treacle on a toffee apple; someone threw a rock on it and the silence exploded into a wind chime-like melody.

On the way back, the ground started moving. “That’s not the ground,” Pierre corrected, “that’s caribou.” We stopped to watch as one became three, became five, became 20, became more than I could count. A migrating herd, nibbling at the lichen-coated rocks. One stopped and looked me right in the eye – I gasped, ►

‘We spent the evening at the park’s cabins, kayaking on nearby Lake Manarsulik, looking for rock ptarmigan and watching the sun flare scarlet as it sunk below the horizon’



Blazing paddles
Enjoying a sunset
paddle at Lake
Manarsulik below
Pingualuit Crater

Musky waters

(clockwise from this)

A musk-ox watches on Diana Island; a curious minke whale surfaces along the peninsula at Quaqtq; sunset at the small community of Quaqtq; a traditional dugout Canadian canoe – with the help of modern engine power







Wild swimming
A polar bear takes to
the water beneath the
cliffs of Akpatok Island



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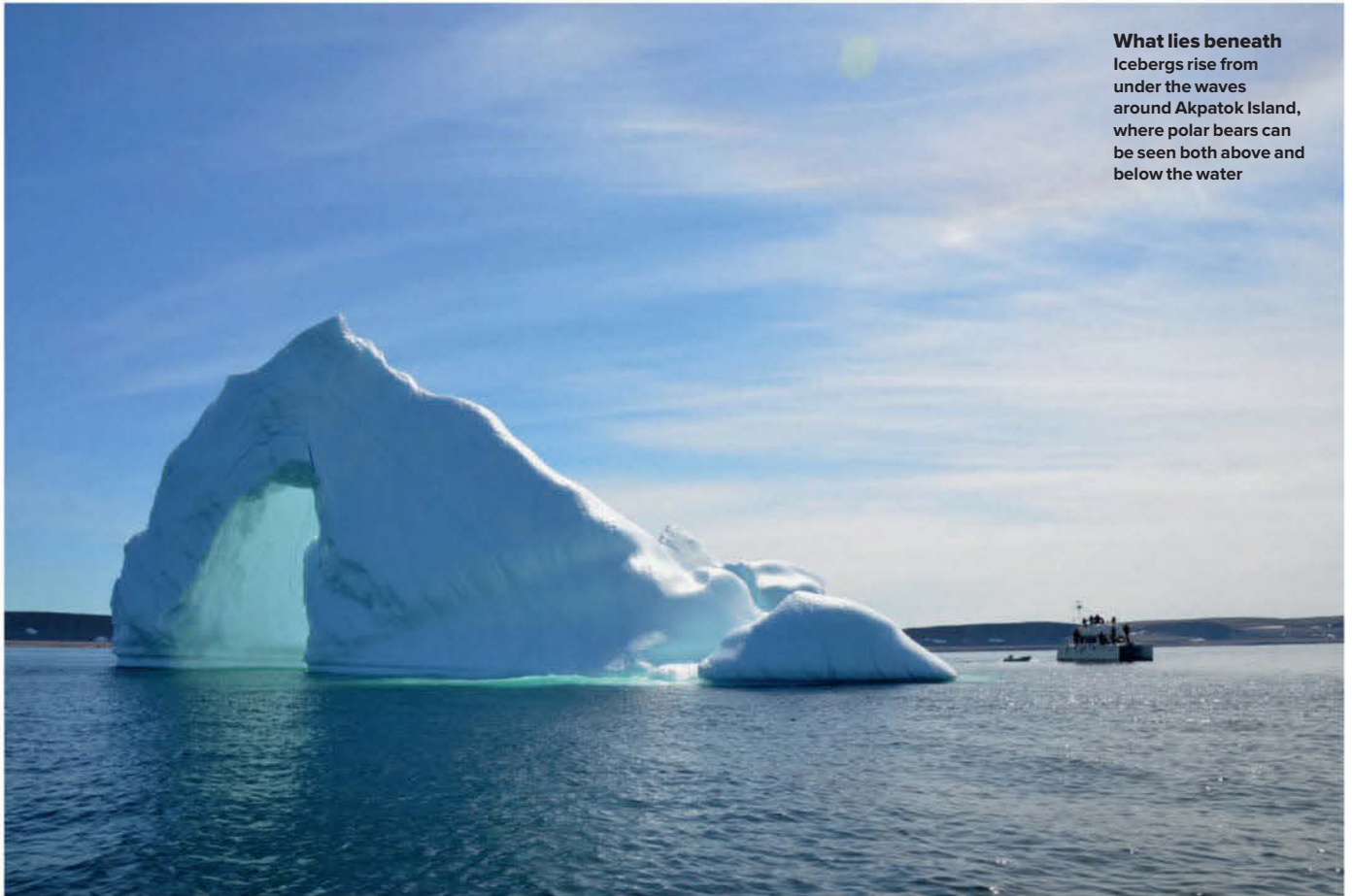
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What lies beneath
Icebergs rise from
under the waves
around Akpatok Island,
where polar bears can
be seen both above and
below the water



‘As we drifted, a large male polar bear emerged above a slither of snow. He raised his head to sniff the air – our scent had attracted him’

◀ overwhelmed by our connection. Seconds later he was gone, but it took a while before I could move, reluctant to break the magic.

Holy cow!

More wildlife beckoned at Quaqtuq. Smaller than Kangisujuaq, this hamlet houses around 315 people. It has an airport, hotel, school and hospital, but I headed straight for the harbour where a man called Bobby was waiting. He transported me to nearby Diana Island in what looked like a traditional Canadian canoe – but actually concealed two powerful engines.

The grassy atoll was deserted; I spotted a few clumps of brown wool strung amid the grass but otherwise it seemed we had the place to ourselves. Then Bobby stopped and gestured uphill. At first I thought they were cows but, as we got closer, I realised they were bigger. Musk-ox. With giant curled horns and scraggy light-brown and white coats, they resembled prehistoric bison. They eyed us warily as we moved past, the larger ones standing in front of their young. When they decided we’d got close enough, the ten-strong herd began to run, shaking the earth. It was like standing in the bottom of a bass drum.

Exhilarated, we left the musk-ox to their idyll and headed back to the village. As we tore through the water, bearded seal popped

up to check out the commotion, then a minke whale emerged to accompany us home, giving the odd spurt from its blowhole. I couldn’t stop smiling for the rest of the night.

Bear on board

Word of a polar bear sighting on the edge of town circulated at the hotel the next morning. Perhaps it was a good omen for my final trip, to Akpatok Island with the armed pilot. Akpatok is actually part of neighbouring territory, Nunavut, but has been under Nunavik protection since 2008. In winter, when ice connects this massive 903 sq km landmass to the mainland, polar bears cross over. When their route back melts in summer, many remain stranded. This makes it an ideal place to spot them.

So there we were, staring at Akpatok’s giant cliffs. These cliffs provide nesting sites for thick-billed murre, an important food source for polar bears. But the bears didn’t seem to be hunting today. Instead Kuujuaq fireman David Mesher, who had stayed overnight on the boat, showed me photographs of polar bears swimming; he explained that he and the crew slept in shifts to ensure they didn’t take on any furry white stowaways...

Almost on cue we heard a commotion upstairs – a bear had been sighted. We ran to the deck and captain Johnny cut the engine. I was visibly shaking with anticipation. As we drifted, a large male polar bear emerged above a slither of snow. He raised his head to sniff the air – our scent had attracted him. He looked at us and then at the drop beneath his feet as though contemplating the descent. Even from this distance I could tell he was huge but I wasn’t worried. The trip may have started with guns but the only shooting now was with cameras. I gazed at the bear, my nose fizzing as I tried to stop myself from crying, and mused how much like Nunavik he was: unexpected, wild, tear-inducingly beautiful and simply unforgettable. ■

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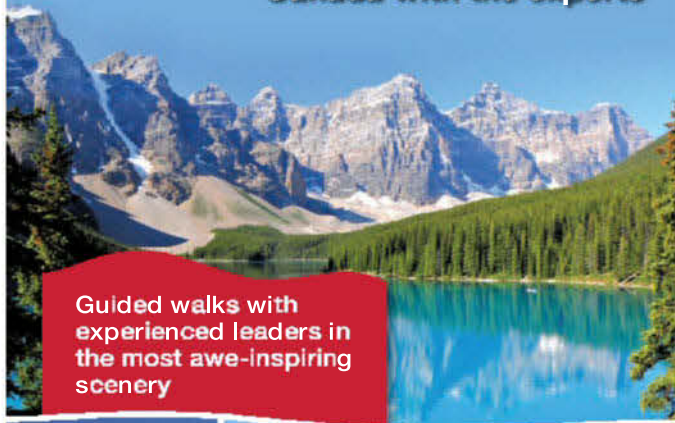
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Nunavik, Canada Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Regional capital: Kuujuaq
Regional population: 12,000
Language: Inuktitut, French, English
Time: GMT-5 (Mar-Nov GMT-4)
International dialling code: +1
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Canadian dollar (C\$), currently around C\$1.80 to the UK£. Take plenty of cash: ATMs are difficult to find; credit cards are accepted only in larger towns, in a limited number of places.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ **Summer:** changeable conditions but often bright sunshine, with highs around 10°C, though rain, wind and even snow are possible. Pack warm clothes as well as sunscreen and insect repellent.

■ **Winter:** snow can come early and linger late. Average lows around -24°C in Kuujuaq but can get much colder. Blizzards are common. High chance of seeing northern lights.

Health & safety

Comprehensive **travel insurance is essential:** healthcare is good but expensive and serious medical attention will require evacuation to Montréal. Mains water is safe to drink. No specific vaccinations are required.

Further reading & information

There are no Nunavik guidebooks. The Lonely Planet and Rough Guides **Canada** guides have Nunavik chapters. *The Long Exile: A Tale of Inuit Betrayal and Survival in the High Arctic* (Vintage, 2008) by Melanie McGrath
Kuujuaq: Memories and Musings (Unica, 1995) by Dorothy Mesher
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THE TRIP

Getting there

There are no direct flights to Nunavik from the UK. **Air Canada** (0871 220 1111, aircanada.com) flies London-Montréal. Returns cost from around £560; flight time is from 7.5 hours. **First Air** (www.firstair.ca) flies daily to Kuujuaq from Montréal. Prices start from around C\$2,400 (£1,340) return; journey time 2.5 hours.

Getting around

Arctic Québec is **hard to traverse** without prearranged transport or the services of a tour operator. Travel is by small twin otter planes (airinuit.com).

Tour operators offering Nunavik trips to see the Big Three (polar bear, musk-ox, caribou) include **Audley Travel** (01993 838 000, audleytravel.com), **Discover the World** (01737 214250, discover-the-world.co.uk) and **Bridge & Wickers** (020 3355 7918, bridgeandwickers.co.uk). A nine-day trip, including internal flights, most meals, accommodation and the services of an Inuit guide, start from £6,100; this doesn't include Pingualuit.

For add-ons or to book local charter flights, contact **Inuit Adventures** (www.inuitadventures.com).

Cost of travel

Due to its remote location, the difficulty of independent travel and scarcity of accommodation and dining options, **Nunavik is not cheap**. Expect to pay around C\$7 (£3.90) for a beer, C\$30 (£17) for a meal in a restaurant.

Accommodation

There are two options in Kuujuaq: the **Kuujuaq Inn** (from C\$275 (£153)), which has a restaurant/canteen and bar, and the **Kuujuaq Cooperative Hotel** (from C\$295 (£164)). The **Kangiqsujuaq Inn** (from C\$360 (£200)) is Kangiqsujuaq's only hotel; in Quaqtaq you'll find the **Co-op Hotel** (from C\$295 (£164)). These are all basic but clean and

comfortable, with self-catering kitchens. See www.bonjourquebec.com.

Base Camp Lake Manarsulik in Pingualuit (www.nunavikparks.ca) has cabins (*below*) from C\$195 (£108).

Food & drink

Eating out options are limited; food is similar to the rest of Québec. Fish is often on the menu.

NUNAVIK HIGHLIGHTS



- 1 Kuujuaq** The gateway to the north. It has souvenir shops, a local supermarket and a bar, where you can have a drink with the locals.
- 2 Kangiqsujuaq** This small northern community is an essential stop before heading to Pingualuit. Visit the interpretation centre to learn about the local people and wildlife, then meander around the mural-decorated houses by the shore.
- 3 Pingualuit National Park** Sharing the name of the meteor crater within its boundaries, the park

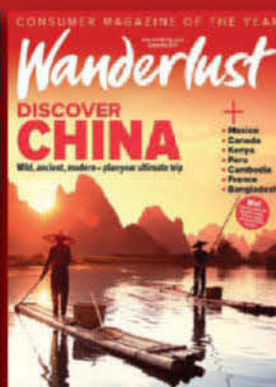
- (above) is also home to wildlife (including caribou and ptarmigan) and impressive lunar-like landscapes.
- 4 Diana Island** This isle off Quaqtaq is home to a herd of prehistoric-looking musk-ox. Its waters teem with bearded seals and minke whales.
 - 5 Akpatok Island** The place to spot polar bears (especially in summer), as well as the thick-billed murre, black guillemot and peregrine falcons that line the limestone cliffs.
 - 6 Kangiqsualujuaq** This village is the gateway to the Torngat Mountains and starting point for canoeing expeditions on Ungava Bay.



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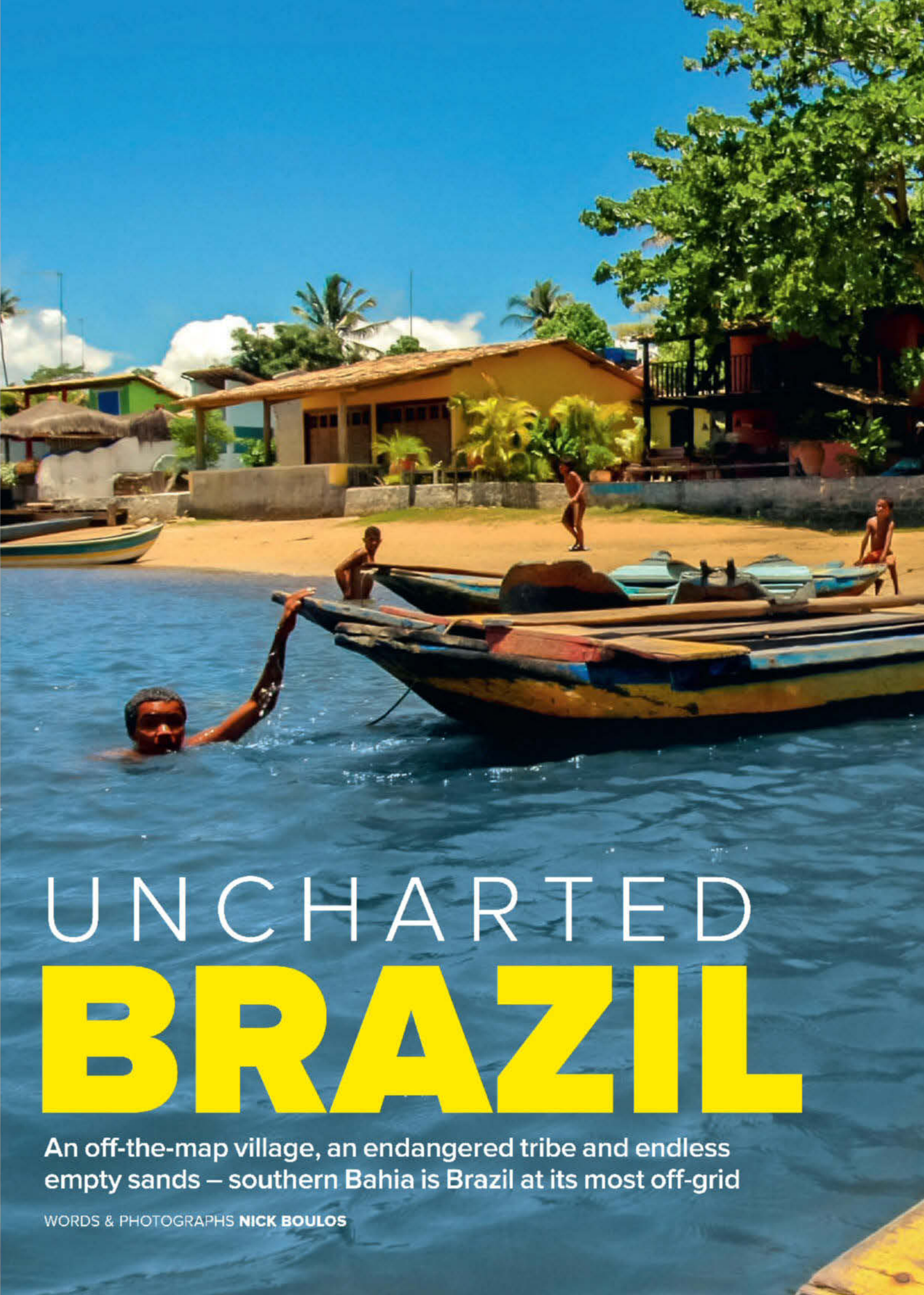
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UNCHARTED **BRAZIL**

An off-the-map village, an endangered tribe and endless empty sands – southern Bahia is Brazil at its most off-grid

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **NICK BOULOS**



Brazil: unplugged
The Bahian village of
Caraíva has no roads
and no cars; electricity
only arrived in 2008



Cool and colourful
A local 'taxi' driver
takes it easy in Caraíva,
a village full of brightly
painted homes and
vibrant street art



Happy, Bahia
Life's a beach in
Caraíva – what's
not to smile about?



There's an unwritten rule that when a full moon shines on the village of Caraíva, it's lights out. Once a month, the 300 residents of this curious Brazilian beachside community synchronise their switch-off, so that their sandy streets are illuminated only by flickering candles and an ethereal lunar luminescence.

Squeezed between the Atlantic and the Rio Caraíva, and hemmed in by Monte Pascoal National Park, this sleepy spot occupies a spit of land on Brazil's east coast. Essentially cut off from the mainland and the modern world – there are no roads, cars or bridges, and electricity only arrived in 2008 – Caraíva has retained a sense of yesteryear.

The hippies turned up in the 1970s as whispers spread of this secret, sundrenched idyll. Its location on southern Bahia's undeveloped coast has helped it remain off the radar but I'd heard rumours, and was lured by the promise of miles of pristine, deserted shores, quiet little towns and endangered indigenous peoples.

The nearest city is Porto Seguro, 100km to the north. With guide Alex behind the wheel (driving a little too fast for comfort), we sped along unpaved roads passing infinite papaya plantations, fields of coffee and blink-and-miss-them villages with endearing names such as Vale Verde (Green Valley).

"I holidayed in Caraíva as a child. Back then it took us three days to get there along this road – we were forever getting stuck in the mud," said Alex. "I want to retire there. It's paradise. Many Brazilians know about it but it's still hard to get to, so few bother visiting."

Caraíva (pronounced kara-ee-va) appeared on the other side of a cloudy river: small huts painted in almost fluorescent shades of ►





Hanging out
Streamers decorate
Caraíva's old Catholic
church, while Edite
Dos Santos and her
family (right) enjoy a
lazy day on their porch

◀ pink, yellow, blue and green against a backdrop of tropical plants. Breeza was waiting to meet us on the dock. She had big brown eyes and dark hair speckled with grey – and just like all the other ‘taxis’ waiting nearby, she was chomping on the long grass. “There are no cars here, so all the taxis in Caraíva are horse and carts,” explained Alex as Breeza set off, bound for our guesthouse.

The short journey took us along a narrow sandy street where geese waddled and men sat under shady palm trees sipping beer. A lady stood in the shallows, descaling a red snapper for that evening’s dinner. Alex sighed: “Man, I love this place.”

Welcome to paradise

Even on first impressions, Caraíva was clearly a place where even the most stressed of travellers would feel their shoulders drop. It was also plain to see that tourism *has* reached these parts. There were Japanese fusion restaurants, shops selling organic skincare products and several dozen guesthouses, the biggest of which has 12 rooms.

I was staying at Casa da Praia, run by husband-and-wife team Fabio and Claudia Freitas. “The south of Bahia is very different from the rest of the country and even the rest of the state,” said Fabio, who in a previous life worked in the cemetery business before relocating to live a life beside the sea. “Carnival season here lasts much longer because people don’t like to work,” he laughed, before offering to show me around.

The beach was a stone’s throw away. It was long, golden and deserted. I gazed out across the Atlantic, hopeful of a glimpse of the whales and dolphins that are often spotted. Further along the coast, around 30km to the north, was Trancoso,

a glossy resort town well established as a haven for the rich and famous. Naomi Campbell has a house there.

It was along here on 22 April 1500 that the Portuguese first set eyes on this mysterious new land. Spotting the rounded peak of Monte Pascoal, and in desperate need of freshwater, they negotiated the rocky reefs and entered the rivers. Some of the shipmates were left on land to make contact with the native Tupiniquin people and went on to establish one of the first settlements in the region.

The 1960s brought change of another kind. As Bahia started to develop and the road network expanded, isolated communities like Caraíva changed forever. Eighty-six-year-old Maria Dos Santos remembers the time well. I met her during my afternoon stroll around the village with Fabio as she and her daughter Edite were lazing on their porch. “Everything came by boat back then,” said Maria, adjusting her lime-green nightie. “That soon changed. Roads were built nearby and lots of people started to leave.”

Caraíva’s current population stands at 328 – barely 10% of the number before the roads came.

Maria and Edite’s simple home overlooked Caraíva’s origins: its Catholic church. The white-and-blue building was hung with red bunting, and patches of the original stone and coral foundations were visible. Across the road was the cemetery. Graves sat under twisted cashew trees and clusters of nettles. The large padlock on the gate didn’t faze Fabio. “It’s only a small cemetery,” he said, picking the lock. “Nobody dies here.”

Fabio and I strolled back to the hotel. At the beachside bar, ‘The Girl from Ipanema’ played on the stereo over the sounds of birdsong and waves. A lone fisherman was slowly guiding his boat back to land. A couple from Hamburg were enjoying scoops





‘We’d never heard of this place but people told us. The road maps are not so good – no mention of Caraíva. It’s off the map – literally’

of *açaí* ice-cream; they told me they were on a self-drive trip along the BR-101 highway. “We’ve come all the way from southern Brazil,” the man said. “It’s much nicer up here, far less crowded and developed. Where else in the world is like this?”

“We’d never heard of this place but people told us,” added his wife. “The road maps are not so good – no mention of Caraíva. It’s off the map – literally.”

Going off piste

There was no need for a map the following morning as Alex and I set off to explore the surrounding area in an open-sided buggy. We sped past farms that sat in the shadow of Monte Pascoal, the forested peak that rises 586m above the valley. We skirted through the national park of the same name – a wilderness of rainforest and swamps stalked by jaguars, sloths and spider monkeys – before cruising along the beach. Up ahead, like dark specks of vanilla in a bowl of custard, were dozens of strange shapes on the yellow sand: a gathering of black vultures feasting on an all-you-can-eat-buffet of dead turtle.

Ditching the buggy, we hopped into a small boat to cross a stream so narrow and shallow I was convinced we could have waded over on

foot. On the other side of the water was the village of Corumbau, a place even more laid-back than Caraíva. Native *arrocha* music and the smell of barbecuing oysters filled the warm air. Hunched over hot coals, the chef tendered to the large stash of oysters he had collected that morning. “Delicious with a splash of lemon,” he beamed, offering one to me.

We walked through the village and along the length of the deserted beach, spying vultures atop the concrete lighthouse. Ahead was a slither of a sandbank that jutted out into the cobalt water. “This place is packed every weekend,” said Alex. It seemed impossible. Today, it was just us, two buxom ladies with true Bahia booties and countless pale-grey seabirds.

The large flock suddenly took flight, soaring through the air in one impressive formation. Among them, darting around skittishly, was the source of their anxiety: a lone predator. The eagle selected its target and went in full pursuit, separating the bird from the rest of the flock. Swooping low, the raptor followed its prey relentlessly.

I watched the drama while dipping my toes into the warm water; it was still unfolding as I ventured in deeper, wallowing happily and watching the rain clouds out at sea. The silence was broken by Alex. “Man, I love this place,” he said, not for the first or last time that day.

Tribe on the edge

The beautiful beaches of Bahia have pulling power but there’s also a history and a soul here that’s every bit as alluring. After the local Tupiniquin were displaced by the Portuguese, the Gê tribe moved in and attacked the colonisers. They proved formidable opponents, but gradually declined due to disease; however, their descendents – the Pataxó – are still here, and still embattled.

The largest of the state’s seven indigenous groups, the Pataxó were handed land around Caraíva in 1926, which was designated

**‘The beautiful beaches of Bahia have pulling power
but there’s also a soul here that’s every bit as alluring’**





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Food for thought
Fishing for your supper is still common in Caraíva – locals head out in small boats and gut their catch on the shore

◀ a protected Indian reserve. It came under almost instant attack from cattle ranchers and farmers, with a nod from the government. Now, though, a different challenge faces them.

Arriving at the village of Aldeia – more Mediterranean villas than native tipis and mudhouses – I was granted an audience with the local chief, a friendly chap called Awrau. “It’s a stressful job but an important one. I’m proud to represent my people,” he said.

Awrau invited us into his modern home. Hanging on the wall were framed photos of departed relatives wearing giant beads made from coconut shells and extravagant feathered headdresses. “The past is painful,” said Awrau, speaking of the centuries gone by since the Portuguese arrived. “We feel sad about that period but that’s over now. We must live with and learn from each other.”

The group suffered more bloodshed in 1951 when a wealthy farmer from Corumbau was kidnapped. Police forces from the north and south sprang into action sparking a bloody gun battle, with the Indian reservation caught in the crossfire. “Many died and many more fled. Most didn’t return for 20 years. Slowly they came back and we began rebuilding the village.”

The mood in the room was sombre but outside children played, music blaring from their mobile phones. “We have modern homes, with TV and internet, but our traditions are intact,” insisted Awrau. “Our community spirit is still alive. We continue to use medicinal plants to heal the sick. We still fish for our food and we still build our own furniture.”

But like indigenous communities the world over, such traditions are increasingly under strain as younger generations seek a different path in the wider world. As you’d expect from a wise Indian chief, Awrau had the answer. “It’s a big worry but we cannot pretend the modern world doesn’t exist.

We allow our young to leave and go to university in the big cities under the promise that they return with their newfound knowledge and skills to make the village better.”

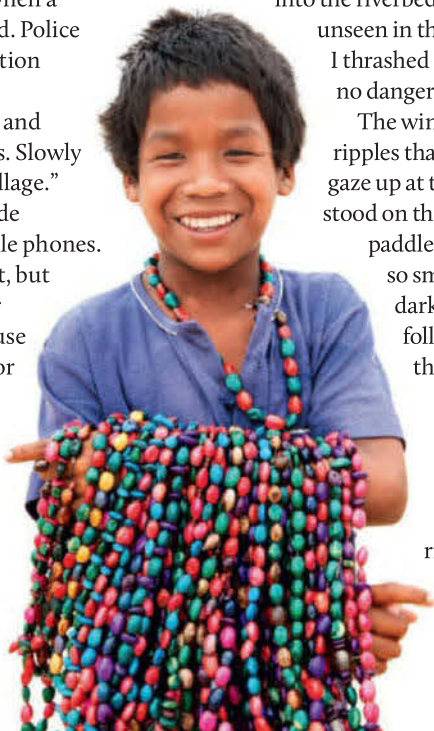
The secret beach

On my final afternoon I pondered the future of the Pataxó while attempting to stand-up paddle-surf on the Rio Caraíva, a popular pastime in these parts, and – in theory – a much more relaxed way to take in the scenery. Fabio taught me the basics as we zig-zagged our way across the water, which was lined on both sides by impenetrable mangroves. The silence and solitude intensified with every bend of the river, the sounds of the village growing fainter with each stroke.

I proved to be a natural, falling in only four times... My feet sank into the riverbed’s thick mud and knocked against large boulders, unseen in the murky depths. “Don’t worry,” laughed Fabio as I thrashed around, trying to get back on my board. “There’s no danger here – no crocodiles or snakes.”

The wind picked up, propelling us forwards and creating ripples that danced across the sepia surface. I stopped to gaze up at the green mountaintops; a row of palm trees stood on the highest ridge, like swaying scarecrows. Fabio paddled close to the mangroves and paused beside a gap so small I hadn’t even spotted it. He vanished into the darkness, leaving me alone on the river. I quickly followed him, crouching down to squeeze through the narrow channel.

On the other side was Caraíva’s parting gift: the smallest beach I have ever seen, barely ten paces long, backed by a steep slope. Fabio and I raced to the top, reaching the sandy summit just as the setting sun gently kissed the peaks, basking the river and mangroves below in the warmest of amber glows – a farewell glimpse of Bahia’s special little secret. ▀



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Bahia, Brazil Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

State capital: Salvador
State population: 15 million
Language: Portuguese. English also widely spoken.
Time: GMT-3
International dialling code: +55
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Brazilian real (R\$), currently around R\$3.9 to the UK£. Most major towns have ATMs but none are available on Caraíva. Take plenty of cash.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- **Winter:** the wettest months, with cooler temperatures – around and below the mid-20°Cs.
- Consistently **warm** with temperatures around 30°C.
- Peak **summer** months: hot and largely dry; the busiest time to visit. Salvador Carnival is in February/March.

Health & safety

While safer than some of Brazil's big cities further south, **care should be taken in Salvador**. Avoid wearing jewellery and be discreet with your camera and other valuables.

Malaria is not a problem in Bahia state. Don't drink the tap water. Make sure you use adequate protection against the strong sun.

Further reading & information

Bahia (Bradt, 2010), region-specific guide with detailed information
Brazil (Lonely Planet, 2013)
Brazil (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012) by Michael Palin, which accompanied the BBC TV series
www.visitbrasil.com Official Visit Brazil tourist board site
www.lata.org The Latin America Travel Association

More online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/151 for links to more content:

ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ Brazil's Pantanal: jaguar central – issue 110
 - ◆ First 24hrs: Rio – issue 117
 - ◆ Brazil's dune coast – issue 123
- #### PLANNING GUIDES
- ◆ Brazil travel guide

THE TRIP

i The author travelled with **Journey Latin America** (020 8622 8444, journeylatinamerica.co.uk). An 11-day trip to the Bahia region, visiting Salvador, Chapada Diamantina and Caraíva, costs from £2,395pp based on two sharing, including flights from London, domestic flights, all transfers, B&B accommodation and some excursions.

Getting there

There are no direct flights to Salvador (for Bahia) from the UK. The author travelled with **Tap Portugal** (0845 601 0932, flytap.com), which offers daily flights to Salvador with easy connections via Lisbon. Return fares start from £733; travel time is around 12 hours, depending on stopover.

Getting around

Do not underestimate the distances involved: Caraíva is around 700km from Salvador.

Several **long-distance bus** companies, such as Aguiá Branca (aguia branca.com.br), offer regular, comfy services along the coast. Journey time from Salvador to Porto Seguro, the nearest town to Caraíva, is around 11 hours; one-way fares cost R\$160 (£41).

Alternatively, **low-cost carrier Gol** (voegol.com.br) flies from Salvador to Porto Seguro. Returns start from US\$170 (£105); journey time is one hour.

A **taxi** from Porto Seguro to Caraíva costs R\$350 (£90) and takes two hours.

Cost of travel

Bahia is **cheaper** than many other places in Brazil. Expect to pay around R\$34 (£9) for a decent dinner in Salvador and R\$10 (£2.50) for a beer in a bar in Caraíva.

Accommodation

Salvador has everything from luxury hotels to modest guesthouses. The colonial **Villa Bahia** (en.lavillabahia.com) is one of the city's best; doubles from R\$530 (£135). Those on a budget should try **Hotel Redfish** (hotelredfish.com); doubles from R\$190 (£48).

Choices are more limited in Caraíva. Right on the beach, the family-run **Casa da Praia** (www.casasdapraiaacaraiva.com.br; Portuguese) is recommended; doubles from R\$230 (£58).

Food & drink

The cuisine of Bahia is heavily influenced by its **African heritage**. Stews feature on many menus. Try the **seafood-based moqueca**, made with coconut milk and palm oil. Traditional Portuguese dishes are also popular.



BEST OF BAHIA

- 1 Salvador** Explore the cathedrals, squares and cobbled streets of Brazil's third-largest city (*pictured*).
- 2 Chapada Diamantina National Park** Hike the tabletop mountains of this quiet wilderness where gold and diamonds were once mined.
- 3 Caraíva** Step back in time at this secret beachside spot and laidback fishing village.
- 4 Itacaré** Catch some waves at this coastal town famed for its surfing and often regarded as Brazil's answer to Hawaii.
- 5 Praia do Forte** Watch sea turtles come ashore on the white sandy beaches of Praia do Forte to lay their eggs, protected by the successful Tamar Project (projetoamar.org.br; in Portuguese).



Sweden



Aurora on the cheap

Trips to see the northern lights are typically pricey – but do they have to be? We headed to Arctic Sweden on a budget to find out...

WORDS **PETER MOORE**



How did Örjan, a gruff, weathered man in his 50s, explain his system for rating northern lights displays? A one out of ten, he said, was a faint smudge in the sky. A perfect ten was when the lights hung around you, 360 degrees, shimmering and cascading like a celestial waterfall. "It only happens every four years or so. And if I see them I don't tell anyone. People would lose their minds."

I nodded sagely. To the local Sámi, the lights represent the spirits of ancestors; pointing at them was regarded as bad luck.

"Not the Sámi!" he replied, incredulously. "The tourists!"

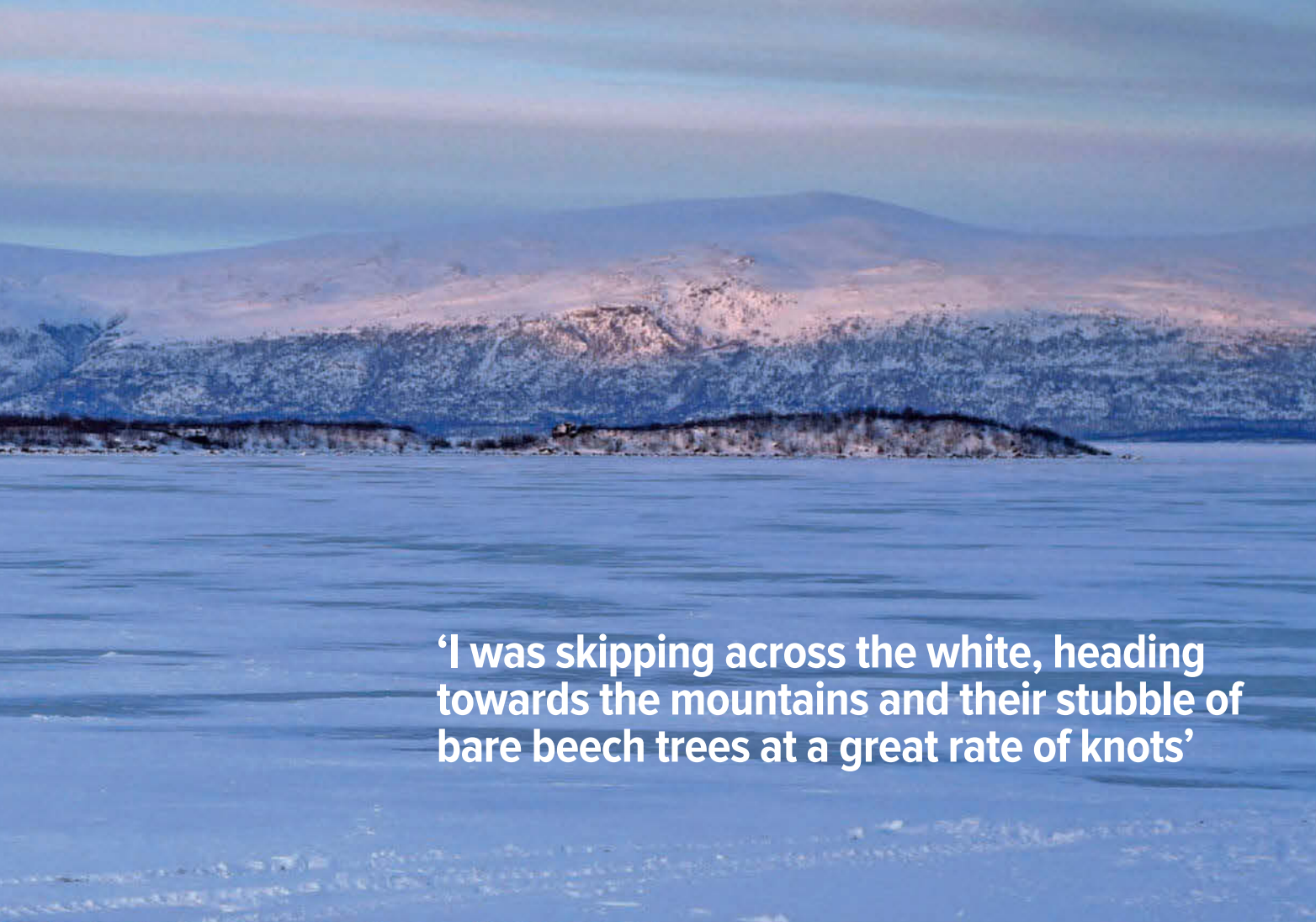
That would be the people spending thousands of pounds to catch a glimpse of such a wonder. I was in Abisko on the cheap – and I'd still be teed off if he didn't tell me.

The blue hole

I was staying at the hostel run by Örjan and his sons, Tomas and Andreas, in Abisko Östra in Swedish Lapland. It was part of my attempt to see if it was possible to experience the northern lights on a budget of £250. I'd settled on Abisko because it was cheap to get to, cheap to stay in and regarded by many as the best place in the world to see the aurora. There's a 'blue hole' in the sky over the town lake, apparently, that scientists say keeps the sky clear here even when it's overcast in surrounding areas.

In keeping with my budget theme I'd arrived the day before by bus from Kiruna. It dropped me in front of the MackåMat in Abisko Östra, a combined petrol station, general store, restaurant and pub overlooking frozen Torneträsk lake and the mountain range to the north. Östra is the dowdy practical sister of Abisko Turiststation, the more glamorous, snowbunny resort 2km to the west. As ►





‘I was skipping across the white, heading towards the mountains and their stubble of bare beech trees at a great rate of knots’



Life in a cold climate
(clockwise from this)
The northern lights have their usual effect on another giddy visitor at Abisko Sky Station; trees in the -47 Celsius landscape; the Abisko Fjallturer Hostel; taking a stroll across frozen lake Torneträsk; *(previous)* the northern lights undulate over Abisko Mountain Station



◀ well as the MackåMat, Abisko Östra has a supermarket, a school and a smattering of quaint clapboard houses painted either red, brown or yellow. It may be utilitarian and functional but it's still surrounded by the same spectacular wilderness.

My hostel, Fjälturer, sat on a hill; snowshoes and cross-country skis hung on the outside wall while the staircase was lined with thermal jumpsuits and snowboots. Tomas explained that I was free to use any of the gear during my stay. "We also have a sauna," he said. "You have to use it naked." Nakedness cuts down on bacteria, apparently.

It was a rare overcast evening, so I asked Tomas what people did for fun. "Beer and sauna nights, organised on Facebook," he told me. However, the next one wasn't until Saturday, so he suggested I go back to the MackåMat. I ate reindeer linguine in a lounge bar with dim lights and dark-panelled walls; coverage of the Winter Olympics played on a television hung high in a corner. The clouds remained, so the huge photo of swirling green aurora that decorated the bar's ceiling was the closest I got to seeing the lights that night. But I had tried reindeer. (It tastes like venison, in case you're wondering.)

Stocking up

While the general store at the MackåMat was where locals shopped for outdoor gear, Coop Lappporten was where they bought groceries, posted letters and picked up their prescriptions. For me, it was the key to eating affordably during my stay.

I love wandering around supermarkets when I travel; I love searching for unusual, exotic items, and get a juvenile thrill from everyday products with silly or rude names. Coop Lappporten didn't disappoint. I found vacuum-sealed reindeer steaks and chocolate bars called Plopp and Kex. As well as pasta, broccoli, cheese and chocolate, I bought Swedish meatballs, a smoked cod roe paste called Kaviar, a packet of vinyl-sized crispbread wafers and a couple of bottles of Julmust, a festive root beer-like drink known as Christmas Sap that was reduced in price because Christmas was well and truly over.

The girl scanning my items was particularly impressed that I'd bought the crispbread. "They've got a hole in the middle, you know," she said. "You slot them onto a pole that hangs across the kitchen."

She told me that she used to make them with her grandmother, using a *kruskavel*, a knobbly rolling pin, to make the distinctive dimples. Wafers would be taken

down as needed, and replaced when the next batch were made, following harvest or in the spring when frozen river waters began to flow again.

The tube of Kaviar caught her attention too. "Oh, you must get some eggs," she said. "Hardboiled, on the crispbread, with Kaviar on top. It's delicious."

Snow patrol

Shopping done, and the sky still crisp and clear, I decided to do something active.

There is no shortage of things to do in Abisko. For example, it is the head of the Kungsleden Trail, a 450km walk with huts every 20km or so that can be followed in both summer and winter. There's the Naturum visitor centre, run by the Swedish Environment Agency, which explains about local flora and fauna; there's a canyon that can be explored, and a chairlift up Mount Nuolja. If you have the cash, you can also go dogsledding, snowmobiling or ice fishing.

I decided to take advantage of my hostel's complimentary gear and go snowshoeing. Once I figured out how to put the snowshoes on, I was surprised by how much difference they made. Earlier in the day I had ventured out to see the huskies in their kennels, and found myself struggling



Tails from The Unknown
A team of huskies return from 'The Unknown' as the sun sets behind them; (left) a frozen river in Abisko National Park

'I heard the dog sleds coming long before I saw them – the excited yelps cutting the crisp air like a knife, the dogs running their noses along the snowdrift to cool down'

through a mini snowdrift like I was Scott of the Antarctic. Now I was skipping across the white, heading towards the mountains and their stubble of bare beech trees at a great rate of knots.

Tomas had suggested I start in the area at the back of the hostel, just beyond the heliport, that was marked on his hand-drawn map as 'The Unknown'. Here I would find a number of easy, flat trails. Walking in snowshoes, he said, was like walking on sand, but with poles to help your balance; it only got tricky on rough terrain or going down steep slopes.

The trails he suggested had neither, just the odd stand of pine trees, heavy with snow, and the occasional passing dog sled. I heard the dog sleds coming long before I saw them, the excited yelps cutting the crisp air like a knife. I stepped aside and watched them pass, the dogs running their noses along the snowdrift to cool down; I returned a nod to the musher as he whistled past. After an

hour or so, I turned back towards the hostel, stopping only to watch the sun sink behind the mountains, without another human being in sight.

Aurora-ish

Soon it was time to venture out to see the lights, the main reason for my budget Arctic adventure. Tomas had told me that the heliport was as good a place as any, offering views across the lake, so I put on every piece of clothing I'd brought with me and trudged into the -20°C cold. After an hour of shifting from one foot to the other and shaking my hands to keep warm, a greenish-brown smudge appeared in the sky to the east, spreading like a spilt beer, before suddenly disappearing. I waited for it to reappear, but it didn't.

I'd seen the northern lights. I think.

The next morning, in the kitchen of the Fjälturer hostel, guests swapped tales of aurora sightings and showed photos of the

displays they'd seen. Alan and Seth from Hong Kong had taken a series of spectacular shots down at the lake at around 1.30am. I asked what had possessed them to stay up that late. "We didn't stay up," Seth said. "We got up. The paper said it would be a 'three' at around that time."

He pointed to a note pinned to the notice board. Every couple of days, Tomas printed out a report from the local meteorological station that listed the likelihood of displays, their expected intensity and a rough approximation of the best time to see them.

I admit I had deliberately steered clear of aurora websites before visiting Abisko. I didn't want to know if the moon would be waxing or waning, or if a magnetic pulse from the sun was on its way from the sun. I had booked my trip three months earlier, based on when I could get the cheapest flights and a cheap bed in the hostel. I figured that by doing things as cheaply as possible I could increase my chances of ►



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Green and envied
The aurora looms
over Abisko



◀ seeing the lights by staying longer. Having said that, I was pleased to see that tonight's display was expected to peak at the more sociable hour of 9pm. I was less pleased that the lights would be at their most intense on Sunday, two days after I left.

I spent the afternoon attempting a snowshoe reconnaissance of the lake, before giving up and going to the local craftshop/café for a coffee. It was run by Emma, a blonde Swede who looked like Agnetha from Abba; she chatted with customers as she glued sequins to dolls. She had grown up in Abisko under the northern lights, so I asked her if she got blasé about them.

"If they're really spectacular I stop and look," she said. "But most of the time I don't even notice them."

And the sky came to life

At 8pm I made my way down to the lake. I passed the small crowd that had gathered beside the wharf, and headed out to the spot I had found earlier in the afternoon. I had barely arrived when an unearthly green light leaked out from behind the mountain range and across the sky like an alien sunrise. It skittered and flickered, danced and throbbed. By 9pm it had faded and ebbed away. I turned and walked back towards

town, content that I had seen the northern lights properly.

But the aurora hadn't finished with me yet. By the time I hit the caravan park – perhaps the least salubrious part of Abisko – the sky came to life. Lights of varying size, shades of green and intensity came at me from all angles. Some shimmied upwards. Others swirled like lava lamps. One transformed into a prehistoric cave drawing of a fox, its endless tail sweeping around the sky.

When I reached town, it was like a scene from *Ghostbusters*. The aurora appeared out of the top of buildings like ectoplasm, twisting above Abisko before making a dash for the mountains. At the hostel, guests gathered outside laughing, clapping and, I'm afraid to say, pointing like overgrown children. Was this what Örjan had meant when he said the aurora made people lose their minds?

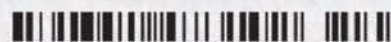
Eventually the lights ebbed away, drifting off to play over another part of the northern skies. Maybe they would return. If I ran into Seth and Alan they would probably tell me where and when. But I felt that now I had seen them – really seen them – I could go to bed, content that I had got my £250's worth.

But the next morning I woke to what felt like a different Abisko, one buffeted

by high winds and closeted by cloud. The wind had blown the top layer of snow off the lake and now it was the exposed chilly blue of a Glacier Mint.

Return flights from Kiruna to the UK had proved expensive, so I'd found a cheap fare home from Stockholm instead; my overnight train to the capital left at 2.19pm. On the way to the station I ran into Örjan and asked him how he rated the display the night before. "Eight out of ten," he said, matter-of-factly.

I had thought it was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen. Maybe he was right to keep a ten to himself. 📺



AURORA FOR UNDER £250 – DID WE DO IT?

One-way flight London-Kiruna: £70

Three nights, Fjälturer hostel: £58

Bus, Kiruna airport-Abisko: £2

Overnight sleeper train,

Abisko-Stockholm Arlanda: £68

One-way flight Stockholm

Arlanda-London: £38

TOTAL:

£236

7 WAYS TO SEE LAPLAND'S LIGHTS IN STYLE

You *can* see the aurora for £250 – but why scrimp if you don't really have to? With a bigger budget, you can see the lights by snowmobile, by sled or without even getting out of bed!

1 AT A COOL HOTEL

And they don't come much cooler than the ICEHOTEL (icehotel.com), a glittery palace perfectly located in Jukkasjärvi, north Sweden – prime aurora territory. Not only will you have a night like no other, bedding down on a frozen divan and reindeer skins amid a gallery of snow sculptures, you can join aurora-watching trips straight from the door, and celebrate a successful night's viewing with a cocktail at the ICEBAR.

Norway's Kirkenes Snowhotel (kirkenessnowhotel.com) offers a similarly spectacular set-up, its sparkling suites created by ice artists from the Chinese city of Harbin. From here, nightly trips take guests out to scout for aurora in the surrounding wilds.

2 BY HUSKY-SLED

Well worth the splurge, the most exhilarating way to explore the frozen north is by puppy-power – either as a passenger to an expert musher or by

driving your own team of dogs. Short husky excursions run from many Lapland lodges; Sweden's ICEHOTEL even offers transfers from Kiruna airport by sled.

However, perhaps the best husky-aurora combo is to join a multi-day safari, mushing your own pack between stove-warmed wilderness cabins, far from light pollution and other people, ensuring that – if the lights do come out – you see them undiluted and without the crowds.

3 BY SNOWMOBILE

Some northern lights safaris use buses and jeeps to take you away from towns and position you in the best aurora spots. Perfectly fine, but not as much fun as roaring across frozen lakes and glistening tundra on your own snowmobile. This way you get to drive out to the darkest, clearest spots, perhaps stopping somewhere remote and north-facing en route to drinking a hot berry juice while you wait for the lights to show; if they don't, at least you've had a thrilling ride. Just be sure to wrap up warm (balaclava



essential) and select a machine that has heated handlebars. Alternatively, join a snowmobile-pulled sleigh excursion to be whizzed into the wilds by someone else.

4 IN BED

Don't fancy freezing outside until the wee hours, waiting for the lights to appear? Then watch the aurora from the comfort of your own bed. Lapland has accommodation options that offer warm and lazy gazing via see-through, frost-free, steam-proof roofs. They come at an extra cost, but if you're lucky enough to watch a long display from under a duvet, you won't regret a penny.

Finland's Hotel Kakslauttanen (kakslauttanen.fi) has an array of glass-topped igloos, well spaced to ensure the privacy of those lying inside. Also in Finland, Nellim Wilderness Hotel (nellim.fi) is home to a handful of Aurora Bubbles – simple wood-and-perspex pods, with excellent heating, perched beside a frozen lake, under supremely dark skies.



Light fantastic! Sweden's ICEHOTEL offers a cool night's sleep, while Finland's Aurora Bubbles (bottom left) let you aurora-watch in bed. Alternatively, explore by snowmobile or take some aurora tips from a pro photographer



5 BY SNOWSHOE

More active types might like to hike for their aurora. Guided night-time walks, using easy-to-master snowshoes to help negotiate the powder, will lead you away from any street or lodge lights; you can tramp to the ideal aurora-viewing spot, exploring the eerie lunar-lit wilderness as you go. Being on the move will also keep you warmer than just standing out in the cold for hours, potentially increasing the length of time for which you can keep a hopeful eye on the sky.

6 ON A CRUISE

For some of the darkest skies – and thus the finest aurora canvas – get away from land entirely: being out at sea ensures low light pollution. Plus many cruise ships in Arctic regions will have onboard northern lights experts, regular aurora lectures and passenger announcements when the lights are spotted,

so you don't have to spend hours freezing out on deck if you don't want to.

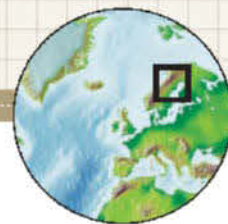
Hurtigruten (hurtigruten.com), which runs voyages along the Norwegian coast, even offers a 'northern lights promise': if you don't spot the aurora during its 12-day *Classic Round Voyage*, it will give you another six-day voyage for free.



7 THROUGH A LENS

Of course you can take your own aurora photos. But in order to get the very best shots of this magical phenomenon, you might want the help of a pro. Some Arctic lodges run aurora photography courses – lasting anything from a few hours to several days – offering tips on how to snap the lights; some will even lend you equipment, such as tripods, and issue you with an aurora-alert buzzer so you don't miss a photo op.

For example, Norway's Lyngen Lodge (lyngenlodge.com) employs an in-house photographer and has special platforms for viewing the aurora in all directions; its staff can also offer advice on post-production editing, so you can maximise the impact of your images with a little computer wizardry. Or try the Aurora Safari Camp (aurorasafaricamp.wordpress.com), a scatter of remote Sami tipis in Swedish Lapland run by photographer Fredrik Broman, who offers winter workshops to help you capture the light in flight. 



Swedish Lapland Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Stockholm
Population: 9.7 million
Language: Swedish; English widely spoken
Time: GMT+1
International dialling code: +46
Visas: Not required by UK nationals
Money: Swedish krona (SEK) currently around 11.6SEK to the UK£. There are ATMs at most major airports, but only a currency exchange at Kiruna. Credit cards are widely accepted.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- Best period for northern lights viewing in far north – though you also need clear skies and good luck.
- Short spring; snow cover still likely.
- Midnight sun shines above the Arctic Circle.
- Summer quickly cools to autumn; good fall colours.

Health & safety
 Obtain a free European Health Insurance Card before leaving the UK (www.nhs.uk/ehic).

Sweden is generally very safe. If you are going to view the northern lights, protect yourself against the cold – you'll be standing around for hours in -20°C temperatures.

Further reading & information

Northern Lights: A Practical Travel Guide (Bradt, 2010) A guide to the best places to view the lights, plus advice on photography, clothing and aurora forecasts softservenews.com/Aurora.htm – Aurora forecasts aurorawatch.lancs.ac.uk – AuroraWatch UK

More online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/151 for links to more content:

- ARCHIVE ARTICLES**
- ◆ Hunting the aurora in Arctic Norway – issue 141
 - ◆ The *Wanderlust* guide to the best of the northern lights – online exclusive
 - ◆ Finnish Lapland: photographing the northern lights – issue 130
- PLANNING GUIDES**
- ◆ Sweden travel guide
 - ◆ Aurora travel guide

THE TRIP

i The author travelled to Swedish Lapland at his own expense, flying via a budget airline, staying in a hostel and largely cooking his own meals. He hoped to do the entire trip for £250, but ended up spending £267.74 after treating himself to a night out at the local pub for a plate of reindeer linguine and a half pint of beer.

✈ Getting there
Norwegian (0843 3780 888, norwegian.com) flies Gatwick-Kiruna via Stockholm Arlanda. The author paid £76.50 one-way; flight time, including a short stop in Stockholm, is 5hrs 15mins.

On his return leg, the author took the more romantic, and only slightly more expensive, option of catching an **overnight train from Abisko to Stockholm** (bed in a six-berth cabin: SEK794 (£68)) and flying back to London from there (£38 one-way).

🚌 Getting around
 Swedish Lapland is **served extensively by bus and train**. A bus from Kiruna to Abisko costs SEK25 (£2.15); a train costs SEK79 (£6.80). Car hire is available at Kiruna airport.

£ Cost of travel
 Sweden is **not cheap**, particularly above the Arctic Circle. That said, there aren't many ways to spend your money in Abisko. A meal, with a beer, at the MackåMat restaurant costs £15-30. A coffee and a pastry at the Abisko Mountain Lodge will set you back £8.

🛏 Accommodation
 The author stayed at the **Fjällturer Hostel** (abisko.net). Dorm beds cost SEK250 (£22). For couples, a private room with toilet is better value at SEK600 (£52). For something a little more upmarket, but still with rustic alpine charm, try the nearby **Abisko Mountain Lodge** (abiskomountainlodge.se). It offers twin rooms, with breakfast, from SEK1,250 (£108); self-catering cabins that sleep four are available for the same price.

🍴 Food & Drink
 The author's grocery bill for three days was only SEK229.65 (£19.82). That included **hostel-dweller staples** such as pasta, pasta sauce and frozen pizza, as well as 'luxury' items: a pack of sliced Edam cheese, a tube of Kaviar, Swedish meatballs. Top bargain was a packet of eight huge crispbreads for only SEK26.95 (£2.30). For a six-pack of Norrlands Guld beer add another SEK62.95 (£5.40).

Abisko Mountain Lodge also offers full and halfboard packages. The restaurant attached to the MackåMat does a nice reindeer linguine for SEK115 (£9.90) and grilled salmon for SEK205 (£17.70).



5 THINGS TO CONSIDER

1 Most hostels and lodges in Abisko offer guests the use of thermal jumpsuits and snowboots. To save money I travelled hand-luggage only, which meant wearing my boots and huge Arctic-grade coat on the plane.

2 Hostels and lodges also offer the use of snowshoes and cross-country skis, which enable easy (free) exploration of Abisko National Park.

3 No matter how well you rug up, after a few hours of standing

around waiting for the northern lights, your extremities will get cold. Consider taking hand and feet warmers, available at most outdoor stores, and at the Abisko MackåMat.

4 Ask the locals about their favourite places to watch the lights – often the best way to avoid the tour buses that turn up from Kiruna and beyond.

5 Lingonberry sauce really makes a difference to Swedish meatballs.



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Japan's Shinkansen
train network turns 50
see p75



Dreamstime

■ **This month's experts include:** Get-off-the map master Leon McCarron, p72 ♦
Ninji master Prof Hiroshi Ikeda, p75 ♦ Responsible diver Rebecca Gillham, p76 ♦
Camera star Steve McCurry, p78 ♦ Health guru Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, p80 ♦



Off the map
“Now I’m sure
I left my car
around here...”

■ The Wanderlust Masterclass

How to get off-the-beaten-track

We all love discovering the lesser known parts of the globe. This is easier said than done though, especially when you’re city-bound or traipsing across tourist-heavy regions. So here’s a guide to getting away from the well-tramped trail.

What IS getting off beat?

It means different things for different people. It could be discovering a hidden spot, having an authentic experience or heading to a new region. “Above all, getting off-the-beaten-

track means finding places that won’t turn up in any guidebook,” considers adventurer, filmmaker and author of *The Road Headed West*, Leon McCarron (leonmccarron.com). “It’s about seeking out the unknown. This doesn’t always mean total wilderness or a lack of people, but it does mean a lack of tourists and an absence of any solid information.”

For Hannah Engelkamp – who walked 1,600km around Wales with a donkey (seasidedonkey.co.uk) – it’s about having an active, involved, engaged experience: “It’s more to do with the creativity and curiosity of your own eyes and mind than studiously trying to be one step ahead of the crowd.”

Planning – or not

“Plan as little as possible,” says TV producer and writer Antonia Bolingbroke-Kent, who penned *A Short Ride in the Jungle: the Ho Chi Minh Trail by Motorcycle* (Summersdale, 2014). “That way you won’t be disappointed if things don’t go to plan. Book a flight and a first night somewhere, then get out into the unknown.”

Leon’s preferred method for uncovering wild sites is to look at a map, cross out all the places he’s heard of and look for the most intriguing bits. He also suggests setting a target, like following a river from source to sea. But the best way to find somewhere new, he says, is by getting to know people:

'Walking is ideal to see the spaces between destinations – where real people live. It's the perfect speed to get a sense of the landscape and experience the subtle changes around you'

"Ask locals and see what they recommend. My absolute top tip: follow dirt roads. Very few tourist resorts lie at the end of a gravel track."

Go solo, go slow

Going it alone in an untrodden region can be scary, but it can also be a life-affirming experience. Also, when you travel solo you're more approachable and less distracted, so more likely to spot unusual things.

"Hidden places are everywhere; you just have to make a little more effort," says Antonia. She suggests finding out where all the tourists are, then heading the other way.

Leon rates South-East Asia in particular: "Beyond the big cities, especially in Thailand and Cambodia, there are the most incredible little towns and villages, not to mention some awesome coastlines and a few jungles to boot." He adds that the USA – thanks to its sheer vastness – is great for finding places that are missing from guidebooks and travel blogs.

But what about cities? "Cities are easy!" reckons Leon. "Start in the centre, choose a road and walk in one direction. In less than an hour you'll almost certainly be somewhere completely new to you."

To really make the most of the experience, travel under your own steam, adds Antonia: "Having a motorbike, car, bike, horse or tuk-tuk will give you access to places fewer people get to visit."

Hannah loves to explore on foot: "You see the spaces between destinations – the places that real people live. Walking is the perfect speed to get a sense of the landscape, and experience the subtle changes in culture, accents, hedgerows, menus, weather and everything else that makes the world brilliant."

Join a group

Joining a tour can be adventurous too. Many tour operators use tried and trusted local ground handlers who know the best places to go; many will arrange stays at local homes or meals at restaurants unknown to guidebooks. Some operators – such as Undiscovered Destinations (undiscovered-destinations.com) – specialise in off-beat spots. "We believe

that locals know best," explains company director Jim Louth. "Working with entirely local people on the ground makes the experience that much more authentic." He adds that while going it alone suits some, others need some support: "We often receive bookings from experienced travellers who'd like to start their trip with a short, organised tour to get a feel for a country, before staying on to explore on their own."

Wild Frontiers (wildfrontierstravel.com) regularly offers recce trips trialing new or untested destinations. Founder Jonny Bealby has been running recce tours since 2004 and says they're his most popular trips. "We take people to the Congo, Afghanistan, into the Hindu Kush and many other places," he says. "The secret to any offbeat experience – be it with a group or going solo – is knowledge, and that generally comes from traipsing thousands of miles around the globe."

Need to know

While getting off-the-beaten-track can offer unparalleled travel experiences, it's not without some risks, so taking basic safety precautions is key. John Heppenstall, head of consular campaigns at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, says travel advice and researching health risks is vital.

"It's also crucial to take out comprehensive travel insurance," he explains.

"Think about the activities you might be doing and make sure you're covered for these."

John also suggests sharing your itinerary with family and friends (especially lone travellers) and contacting the FCO if you run

into trouble; it can issue travel documents and advice to injured Brits or victims of crime. Visit www.gov.uk/knowbeforeyougo.

Last but not least, pack light but remain self-sufficient. A sleeping bag, tent, down jacket, reliable rucksack and comfy hiking shoes are musts. "Take a camera and a notepad too," says Leon. "There's no feeling quite as liberating as standing on the shores of a new country with your life on your back and no fixed plans. That's how all the best adventures begin."

TOP TIP

Don't opt for comfort over real experiences, says Hannah: "Sitting on a wall, eating some unidentified barbecued creature, waiting for a bus that might never come – that's a recipe for adventure."

Case study

PAUL SMITH

Paul Smith, aka the Twitchhiker, travelled via Twitter suggestions to find some little-known off-the-beaten-track spots



What does getting off the beaten track mean to you?

Being off the beaten track in the 21st century

is as much about environment as it is about location. Try exploring a city without a mobile phone or a tablet – instead of crowd-sourced recommendations for restaurants, try talking to locals and use your nose instead. And put the camera down – you'll never truly appreciate the moment you're in.

How did you come up with the Twitchhiker concept?

I'd been using Twitter for a year or so and was fascinated by my new network of friends I'd never met. I wondered if an online social network could support me as well as my flesh-and-blood friends, so I put it to the test by attempting to travel the world relying on the goodwill of strangers I met on Twitter.

How successful was it for finding places off the tourist trail?

Everywhere I travelled, I was hosted by locals – finding places tourists don't know about is what locals do very well!

Do you have any off-the-beaten-track recommendations?

Amtrak. Seriously, nowhere near enough people take the time to discover America by train. If you're in the UK, you only have commuter rail as your baseline, and there's no comparison. Amtrak is cheap and easy to do, and it is genuinely the most fun I've ever had travelling.

What tips would you give to people travelling solo?

Trust that there's far more good in the world than bad, but trust your gut. Don't put yourself in situations you can't control. 📱

Read more about Paul's adventures in *Twitchhiker: How One Man Travelled the World by Twitter* (Summersdale, 2010) or on Twitter @twitchhiker



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Zwoooooosh!
Japan's shinkansen
network puts other
trains to shame

DID YOU KNOW?

The construction cost of the original shinkansen was ¥380 billion (£2.2 billion) – nearly twice its estimated budget.



■ Instant Expert

Japan's bullet trains

Why are we talking about trains?

The *shinkansen* – a network of high-speed lines plied by 'bullet trains' – is an icon of modern Japan. But, despite the locos' sleek, futuristic style and enviable to-the-second punctuality, they've actually been around a while: the 'new main line' (the translation of shinkansen) has just turned 50.

The network opened on 1 October 1964 – just nine days before the Tokyo Olympics – and since then has carried more than 5.5 billion passengers.

Wow, so it's come a long way.

Literally. When it first opened, there was only one shinkansen route, between Tokyo and Osaka; now there are six lines, covering nearly 2,400km, at speeds of up to 320km/h. The bullet trains zip travellers all over the Land of the Rising Sun, from Aomori in northern Honshu to Kagoshima in southern Kyushu, via towering Mount Fuji and all the sights in between.

So it will take me everywhere?

Not yet, but expansion continues apace – there are plans to extend the network as far as Sapporo, on northern Hokkaido.

Also, in other developments, there's talk of introducing a luxury footbath service between Shinjo and Fukushima. And in 2013 Japan National Railways tested a train that can hit 498km/h.

Sounds good. But surely expensive...

Surprisingly, not necessarily. Yes, a typical Tokyo-Kyoto return (a journey of two hours, 20 minutes by bullet) costs around £180, but you can cut the cost of long-distance trips by buying a Japan Rail Pass. A pass costs from just £161 for a week's unlimited use on most shinkansen, plus other trains, local buses and some ferries and monorails; for more info see www.japan-rail-pass.com.

Great! So where should I start?

The Tokaido shinkansen, which connects Tokyo and Osaka, is a popular choice – it whizzes west from the capital, via Kyoto; at Osaka you can join the Sanyo line to continue to Hiroshima and Fukuoka.

The Tohoku line links Tokyo and Shin-Aomori, a good jumping-off point in northern Honshu for further forays across the Tsugaru Straits to Hokkaido.

Great! Time to get choo-choo-choosing!

■ 5-step guide to...

BECOMING A NINJA

Ninjas are not simply black-clad figures darting around at breakneck speed – they are experts in the Japanese art of warfare: ninjutsu

1 Use information wisely

Ninjas should be able to obtain information quickly, analyse it and turn it into knowledge – in short, a ninja should be an information specialist.

2 Train both body and soul

Ninjas need strong bodies and strong souls. They must be able to run at least marathon distance and should master some martial arts. Ninjas should also keep calm and be in control of their minds at all times. Before their work, ninjas perform Kujiri Kiri – the 'grid of nine syllable slashes' hand-gesture ritual.

3 Learn the knowledge in nature

Ninjas should observe everything and learn from nature. In order to survive and fulfil their mission, ninjas should make the most use of this information. For instance, ninjas can make poisons from plants, insects and animals.

4 Learn a variety of skills

Ninjas should have a wide range of skills to help them succeed in their mission. For example, learn languages, play music, read books – with diverse knowledge comes greater power.

5 Communicate well

Ninjas should be good at communication with other people. Ninjas should be kind to everyone, and should not make enemies. Most of all, ninjas should not look strong – they should appear to be like ordinary people. 🍱

Ninja tips provided by Professor Ikeda and the Japan National Tourism Organization (jnto.go.jp)

ASK THE EXPERTS

Diving responsibly; African ATM access; the pros and cons of the rabies jab; compact cameras with big potential; and dressing for India – our experts put you in the know

THE EXPERTS



PHILIP BRIGGS
Africa expert & Bradt Travel Guides author



STEVE DAVEY
Wanderlust photo expert,
stevedavey.com



BETH WHITMAN
Author and editor of *Wanderlust and Lipstick* guidebooks for women,
wanderlustandlipstick.com



REBECCA GILLHAM
Greenfins.net Project Manager
at Reef-World Foundation,
reef-world.org

Q I love diving – how can I ensure I do it responsibly, without causing damage to the underwater environment?

S Atkinson, by email

A It's easy to be a responsible diver, you just need to make a few simple yet key decisions about who you choose to dive with and your own actions above and below the water.

More dive centres are taking responsibility for their impact on the marine environment these days. By choosing an environmentally friendly dive centre that has policies in place to limit their threats to the environment, you will not only help decrease your own threat but will encourage other dive centres to follow suit. Look for centres that use mooring buoys instead of anchors, that don't allow fish feeding, that dispose of waste and rubbish responsibly, and that are members of a marine conservation initiative such as Green Fins (greenfins.net).

There are also things you can do as an individual. Look, but don't touch anything – you can cause damage, and the bacteria on you and your equipment can cause diseases. And don't wear gloves – these can give you a false sense of security, encouraging you to touch.

Ensuring you are correctly weighted and maintaining neutral buoyancy throughout your dive will allow you to keep a safe distance from the reef; this will not only protect the delicate marine life but also you and your equipment.

Be aware of your positioning in the water and keep your fins up so as not to damage or disturb anything from direct contact or by stirring up sediment.

As the saying goes: take only memories, leave only bubbles.

Rebecca Gillham, Green Fins Project Manager

Q Can I rely on using ATMs in Africa for my travel cash?

K Moore, by email

A Africa is a big place, with 50 countries; ATM availability varies greatly across them. These days, most capital cities and other large towns continent-wide have ATMs where you can draw local currency against a Visa or Maestro card. Other brands, such as Amex or MasterCard, are generally of more limited use, though again that varies from one country to the next.

The first thing you need to do is to research the individual country or countries you plan to visit, and then your specific itinerary. With a bit of forethought, and the correct card, you should be able to rely on ATMs as a sole source of cash in the likes of South Africa, Namibia, Kenya and other relatively developed countries.

You probably won't if you are going to travel in more remote parts of West, Central or Eastern Africa. In the latter instance, with travellers cheques being close to useless in most parts of Africa, your only viable alternative is

cash, with US dollars being the most widely accepted currency.

Philip Briggs, Africa expert, Bradt Travel Guides

Q I'm on a budget – could I forego rabies jabs?

Sarah Davies, Yorkshire

A There is a significant cost to rabies immunisation but the pre-travel jab buys peace of mind and makes post-bite treatment quicker, safer and cheaper. It also precludes the need for rabies immune globulin, which is unavailable at some destinations and may carry some risk as this is a pooled blood product. Furthermore there is fake vaccine in circulation, including in the Philippines.

Whether you decide to buy the jab or not will depend on the remoteness of your destination, what you are doing (any animal





Nemo found
Divers spy some clown fish under the waves

■ Insiders' Guide to...

VANCOUVER ISLAND



Vicky Boughton, senior product manager at Exodus Travels (exodus.co.uk), reveals the wildlife-filled secrets of this outdoorsy isle in British Columbia

WILD LANDSCAPES: Located between the Vancouver Island Range and Pacific Ocean, the Pacific Rim National Park consists of 500 sq km of verdant rainforest and wild, windswept beaches. Two-thousand-year-old conifers that can reach a staggering 20 metres in circumference can also be found here.

WHAT'S SPECIAL: Long Beach. With almost ten miles of sand and a huge collection of driftwood, the next stop from this rugged beach in the Pacific Rim National Park is Japan! Take the Wickaninnish Trail to the beach and visit during low tide to explore some of the intertidal pools and rocky islands.

BEST TIME: Visit between the end of May and the end of September for the best weather and wildlife-viewing conditions.

BEST PLACE: Clayoquot Sound, a vast area of temperate rainforest with fjord inlets, islands and extensive beaches. Board a zodiac from Tofino to search for resident grey and humpback whales in the surrounding waters, or black bears who can be spotted digging for crabs and clams on the rocky shoreline. The abundant marine and bird life will not disappoint: seals, sea lions, sea otters and orca whales also inhabit this stunning region.



'It's easy to dive responsibly – you must make key decisions about who you dive with and your own actions above and below the water. Take only memories, leave only bubbles'

handling?) and length of time away. It is worth noting that a completed primary course will probably protect for life – so it is a good investment for frequent fliers.

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth, Wanderlust's health guru

Q I'm looking to buy a new camera – ideally one that takes high-quality photos, but is smaller and not overly expensive. Any advice?

John Steward, by email

A There's a reason why professionals carry such large amounts of kit: bigger sensors and lenses will give a greater quality image. But not everyone needs this.

Photography – especially travel photography – is a trade-off between the weight and cost of equipment and the quality. In the past, compact and bridge cameras often had lamentable ISO performance and low-quality lenses. Recently, a number of Compact System Cameras (or

Mirrorless Camera Systems) have been released, which occupy the ground between a full DSLR system and a compact camera. These have interchangeable lenses and DSLR-sized sensors, but without the weight and cost. This is achieved by having a digital, rather than an optical viewfinder. If you can live with this, they are great options, allowing you to always have a camera with you, but without developing a hernia!

Models to look out for include the Nikon N1 series and the Sony NEX-7. This is a fast-moving field though; when selecting cameras, check out the reviews and guides on the incomparable www.dpreview.com first. **Steve Davey, Wanderlust's photography tips guru**

Q I going to India – any advice on what to wear? **Liz Croft, London**
A Bollywood beauties may bare their skin on film but that's a no-no for the general population and (especially) for foreign women. I recommend women dress conservatively and, except in very touristy beach areas, keep shoulders, upper arms and knees covered.

When I travel to India, I generally take one set of clothes and go shopping when I arrive. My favourite chain store is Fab India. I pick up a couple of *kurtas* (long tops), cotton pants and a few scarves that can be worn around my neck for fashion or around my shoulders if I need to stay warm or cover up my arms. **Beth Whitman, author of Wanderlust and Lipstick: For Women Travelling to India**

TAKE BETTER TRAVEL PHOTOS



This month we
meet legendary
photographer

Steve McCurry to find
out what it takes to shoot
an iconic image

When it comes to my famous Afghan girl shot, I actually knew there was something really extraordinary about it; I could see that it was something really special. She was an incredible person with an amazing face.

This shot (*right*) was taken in Kuwait. There were 600-plus oil wells on fire – an environmental catastrophe; oil was spewing into the gulf and wells were ablaze. These camels were probably throwing caution to the wind, looking for something to eat or simply a way out of this dreadful place.

I was trying to juxtapose these camels with the fires and the billowing smoke to demonstrate how catastrophic the situation in the region was. I was sitting on the hood of my jeep trying to keep up with the animals as they moved through the desert. I wasn't using any special equipment, but I'm happy with the shot I managed to capture.

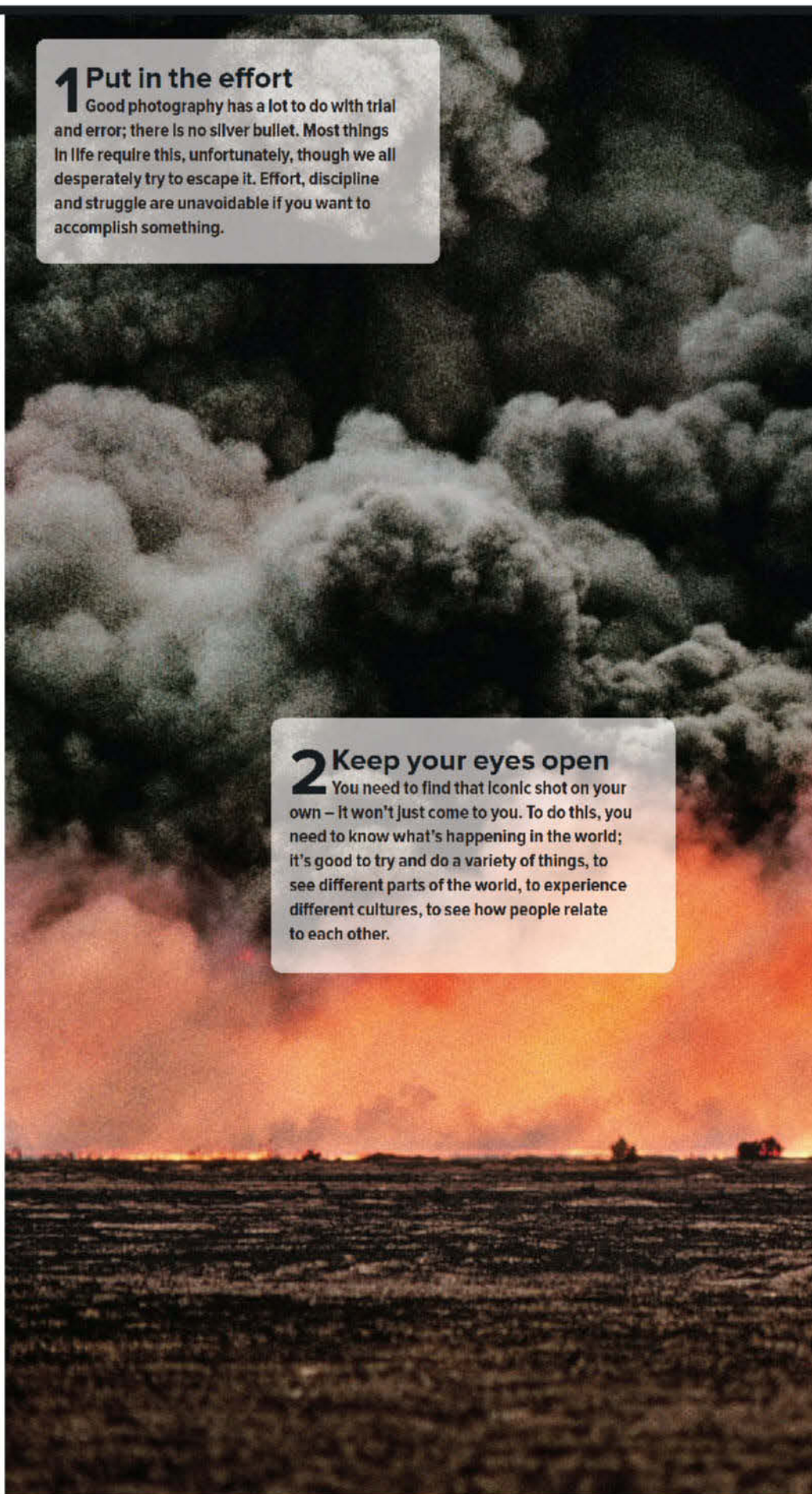
Steve will be hosting a talk about his photography and experiences in association with the Nikon School in spring 2015. Register your interest at www.nikon.co.uk/training/contact-us.aspx; the Nikon School will send further information. 

1 Put in the effort

Good photography has a lot to do with trial and error; there is no silver bullet. Most things in life require this, unfortunately, though we all desperately try to escape it. Effort, discipline and struggle are unavoidable if you want to accomplish something.

2 Keep your eyes open

You need to find that iconic shot on your own – it won't just come to you. To do this, you need to know what's happening in the world; it's good to try and do a variety of things, to see different parts of the world, to experience different cultures, to see how people relate to each other.



3 Remember to have fun

Take photographs for your own pleasure. It's a way to record things – your birthday party, friends having a dinner; it's very important to have this document of your life. You don't need to get an expensive camera. Relax and have fun.

4 You don't have to go far

How far do you have to travel to take a 'travel' photograph? If I walk out of the front door of my apartment, does that count as a journey? Yes – you can practise taking photos anywhere.

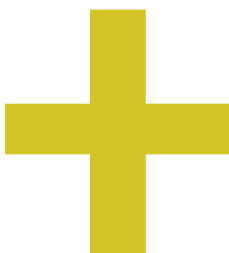
5 Enter competitions

I think photography competitions are useful. You may as well give it a try... *To enter Wanderlust's Travel Photo of the Year Competition, see page 86. But be quick: the closing date is 31 October!*



TRAVEL CLINIC

with Doctor Jane



Under your undies

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth peers into your pants, to help you deal with some of travel's more embarrassing ailments

Some travellers are blasé; others blush. But most of us will become a little alarmed if we notice something untoward happening below our board-short or bikini line. And when you do notice something worrying down there, how do you communicate about it in schoolboy French or broken Spanish? Who will you consult? Here's a guide to what might occur beneath your britches – and what to do about it.

Crotch itch

This is probably the commonest symptom in tropical travellers. Sweaty creases encourage fungal infections (aka thrush), which cause redness, flaking of the skin and sometimes oozing. Anti-fungal creams are fairly readily available over the counter throughout the world, and loose cotton clothes will help prevent the next attack.

Many women develop itching and sometimes white discharge,

which can be unpleasant. When travelling in tropical regions, women should pack their favoured thrush treatment, such as fluconazole tablets or a miconazole pessary, plus an anti-fungal cream.

Men developing red spots on the end of the penis might have caught thrush from their partner; a single application of miconazole cream should sort it. Pubic hair itching could be crab lice, which will need pharmacological eradication.

To do: Wear loose clothing; wash with water (avoid perfumed soaps/shower gels); pack a thrush treatment; know some generic names for effective treatments: terbinafine is the most effective.

Painful piles

Haemorrhoids often cause discomfort among travellers. Anything that increases abdominal pressure increases the likelihood, including people who carry heavy backpacks and/or are constipated are most at

risk. Piles cause bleeding and pain when defecating; the pain persists after defecation and can hamper walking. If piles are bad you'll need to rest up and take stool softeners (eg figs or something from the pharmacy). Cold compresses are soothing. Occasionally a pile can become congested with blood and will need lancing with a scalpel; surprisingly, perhaps, this is pain-relieving.

To do: Eat plenty of fibre, keep well hydrated and stay active to reduce the risk of constipation. Ladies: embrace pilates.

Painful peeing

Increased need to pee and pain at the end of urination suggests a bladder or urinary infection. This is common in women, particularly those who are sexually active and dehydrated. Urinary infections also affect men on occasion.

Drinking lots helps. Changing the acidity of your urine by adding a heaped teaspoonful of baking soda to each glass of

water should help reduce the distress too, and allow you to get to a pharmacy for a short course (three days) of antibiotics.

Men who are hit by urethritis experience significant pain when urinating. This symptom is often a sexually acquired infection, which needs prompt and proper treatment. If possible go to a genitourinary clinic. Most capital cities will have one.

To do: Stay well hydrated; practise safe sex; consult a clinic if symptoms don't settle.

Tender testes

Epididymitis is a bacterial infection that causes the testes

Pants predicaments
Find out what's going on beneath your undergarments and how to solve any problems



'It is, unfortunately, very common for small critters to get lost and disorientated in your underwear'

to become tender to the touch; sufferers will often feel unwell, maybe feverish. This usually settles after a long (six-week) course of antibiotics plus anti-inflammatories, like ibuprofen. If just one is tender, it may be twisted – this needs urgent medical intervention.

To do: Practise safe sex (the infection is often caused by sexually transmitted infections).

Ants in the pants

It is, unfortunately, very common for small critters – from ants to wasps – to get lost and disorientated in your undies. Find out what it is before you attempt to flatten or evict it. For example, if crushed against the skin, blister beetles will cause inflammation in sensitive places, whereas gentle removal will leave both of you unharmed.

Likewise, if you notice a new, black lump that wasn't there the day before – especially at the end of a day walking in the wilds – this is probably a tick. These need to be removed promptly and carefully; do this by getting the finger and thumb on either side of the creature as close to your skin as possible and then pulling steadily away; splash the bite hole with spirit alcohol afterwards.

To do: Investigate, then complete a calm, controlled removal. Be sure to report to a doctor if you subsequently become unwell and/or you notice a red but non-itchy area of redness around the bite site.

Mystery lump

I see many people who have noticed a small lump in the groin or between the legs and are worried. If the lump looks like a zit or pustule, that is probably what it is; these are common in the underpants region. A lump in the groin where the leg joins the trunk can be due to a number of things. If it is painful it could be a hernia, which will need medical assessment. Groin lumps can also be stimulated by infection so lumps will probably mean a trip to a clinic.

To do: If the swelling is more than a centimetre across and isn't settling, see a doctor. A simple zit is harmless if ignored.

Butt boils

Boils are common, especially in hot climates as heat and sweat predispose to skin infections. While small boils will discharge without intervention, large boils on the buttock or close to the anus will need surgical treatment. Generally the boil is

lanced and then packed with ribbon to allow the cavity to fill and not reform. Anyone with a large boil on the butt will need to rest until it has healed; however, sitting for long periods is ill-advised so avoid long journeys. **To do:** Wash/shower often; wear loose 100% cotton undies.

New moles

Dangerous moles – aka suspected malignant melanoma – are most likely to occur in the sun-exposed areas of the skin, but can occur under pants too.

It is possible that your new mole is the result of having scratched or traumatised an existing mole; moles have good blood supplies so swell and bleed more than normal skin.

If worried, you could consult a local doctor. In Asia many dermatologists also treat sexual health symptoms so are good specialists to see. Removal is often quick and easy. You could also do nothing for a week and see your GP on return. Waiting a short while is unlikely to harm.

To do: Don't panic! Book a post-trip GP appointment. 

Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth has written three travel health guides, based on living in the tropics for 11 years; www.wilson-howarth.com

CORRECTION: In last issue's Masterclass on sourcing clean water, we misquoted Dr Jane. We said that she advises avoiding foods prepared/washed with local water such as fruits or salads. This is not the case: Dr Jane says fruits and salads may be risky not because they may be prepared with local water but due to contamination during growing or through handling with unwashed hands. We apologise for the error.

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■ Traveller's Guide To...

TECHNICAL UNDERWEAR

Travel undies are one of the most overlooked items, but they can be key to enjoying your adventures. Here's how to make sure you pick the right pants!

WHY DO I NEED THEM?

You might think your regular underwear will do fine, but the difference a pair of well-made technical pants can make is hugely noticeable. Imagine sitting on a humid train for hours: there's nothing worse than feeling sweaty below – a pair of these will work to move sweat away from your skin, stopping you getting damp. Plan on being on the road/a boat/multi-day walk for a while? You don't want to take masses of underwear with you. Technical underwear is often made from quick-drying fabric, meaning you can wash them daily, knowing they'll be dry for the next day's adventure, and some are made from fabric that prevents odours, meaning you don't *need* to change them quite so often. Finally, if you are getting active, you want underwear that moves well with you. Using special material and panel construction means this kind of underwear offers a superior fit.

WEIGHT

Think light and small – to keep the bulk of your bag down, or to enable you to pack more pairs so you don't need to do laundry if you don't want to. However, don't sacrifice a few grams in weight for comfort.

STYLES

Think about the activities you'll be doing – you may want a variety of styles. Options will include boxer shorts and underpants (men) and lady boxers, fuller briefs and hipster knickers (women).

FIT

This is a very personal choice but whichever type you choose, ensure your undies fit your body shape and don't rise up when you move around.



SEAMS

The fewer the better – these are where underwear can rub and be uncomfortable. Check any seams are not too bulky and are flatlocked for maximum comfort.

FABRIC

Look for stretchy, unrestrictive material that is breathable and that will move sweat away from your body (known as wicking). A quick-drying fabric will make pants easier to hand-wash on the road, so you can pack fewer pairs. Some fabrics have anti-microbial properties – either naturally occurring (eg merino wool) or synthetically added – which helps minimise odours.

Technical underwear

We test out your essential travel kit, so you don't have to...



SUE ME Beech Shorties / Tree Trunks £16

THE TEST: Made from beech-tree pulp, and sold with a pack of seeds (to offset your carbon footprint), these pants have great green credentials. As the fabric is naturally anti-microbial, they smell better for longer too.

SHE SAYS: Of all the boxer short-style pants, these ones felt more like a traditional full brief, with a good fit. The fabric is super soft, the seams minimal and flatlocked for comfort, and the waistband didn't rub.

HE SAYS: Instantly comfy, these are fairly loose – though I had a larger size than I'd usually pick; a closer fit would be better for active days. Seams were not problematic.

Weighing 44g (women's M) and 78g (men's L), these are at the heavier end of the scale. Other fabrics here offer more in the way of quick-drying and wicking properties, but these come at a lower price.

THE VERDICT: A good price for eco-conscious, comfy underwear that feels good, especially on long journeys.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Weight: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.sueme.com



PÁRAMO Cambia Briefs £20

THE TEST: If you're after a pair of good old-fashioned style briefs, these are for you.

The Cambias feature Páramo's Directional Clothing System technology, which makes them very effective at moving sweat away from your body. They are also very fast-drying so washing them on the road is quick and easy.

SHE SAYS: These were fairly snug compared to others on test – they fit quite high around the waist. The fabric is nice and soft. They didn't rub but I found the seams a little bulky – a visible panty line could be an issue!

HE SAYS: Size was also an issue for me. I'm a 34" waist and found these a bit tight – go up a size for comfort. The waistband, fabric and seams were soft against the skin though, so a great option for men who prefer this style.

Unsurprisingly, being the only brief-style on test, these are the lightest men's pants (48g, M); the women's are third-lightest (29g, M).

THE VERDICT: Great fabric for on-the-road washing and against-the-skin comfort, but consider buying the next size up.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Weight: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.paramo.co.uk



SMARTWOOL PhD Seamless Bikini / NTS Micro 150 Boxer Brief £23 / £35

THE TEST: Made from a merino wool blend, which has natural anti-microbial properties, these are good for long trips. They are warm (but not too hot) and move sweat away from the skin when you're active, keeping you cool.

SHE SAYS: A great fit if you like a bikini-type style (not too high or too low). The large waistband feels flattering and seams are soft. A variety of panels in the fabric stretch with you for a perfect fit, even during activity.

HE SAYS: With a close, yet unrestrictive, fit and longer length, these are instantly comfy, and less likely to ride up. The fabric is soft (though I was aware I was wearing wool), with great-feeling seams and waistband.

Weighing 39g (women's M) and 87g (men's M) these were at the heavier end of those on test, though both packed down small.

THE VERDICT: Great fit with nice design touches, though a slightly heavier weight and higher price may deter less active types.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Weight: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.smartwool.com



How we did the test...

We asked gear manufacturers to submit technical underwear that they felt was most suitable for travellers, being lightweight, durable and comfortable for a range of activities. From the 15 pairs we were sent, our editor, Phoebe Smith, and photographer Neil S Price, took them out on the road to see which performed best for women and men. Differing names and prices are indicated if applicable. The six here are all "Wanderlust Approved", with a Value Buy and Best in Test for the overall best buy, being indicated.



BERGANS

Fjellrapp Lady Boxer /
Fjellrapp Boxer

£25

THE TEST: Manufactured from 100% merino wool, these are made to keep you warm when the temperature drops – whether you're stood watching the aurora or out snowshoeing.

SHE SAYS: Unlike other female boxer-styles on test, these feel like they were designed specifically for women. They are longer on the leg, which made for a good fit, if a little restrictive during activity. Having no seam down the front (others did) prevented chafing.

HE SAYS: These feel like thermal underwear – quite long, which took some getting used to, and felt a little restrictive at times. The seams and waistband were soft but the unnecessary embroidered logo rubbed on my leg.

At 75g (women's M) and 90g (men's L) these were the heaviest on test – which is to be expected given the high wool count.

THE VERDICT: A fantastic price for merino wool but the weight and warmth make them better for winter trips than all-round travel.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Weight: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.bergans.com



ARC'TERYX

Phase SL Brief /
Phase SL Boxer £25 / £27

THE TEST: Arc'teryx has come up with a fabric that is quick-drying, stretchy, high-wicking, lightweight, has odour control and uses hydrophobic technology (so won't absorb water) – ideal for active travellers.

SHE SAYS: These were so light I barely felt I was wearing them. The fabric is very soft, the seams and waistband virtually invisible. There's a cotton insert in the crotch for extra comfort. And they pack down so small you can easily take several pairs.

HE SAYS: These are almost like wearing cycling shorts. I wasn't sure that a close fit would be comfy, but the fabric is so good, and the seams so well thought-out, I had no issues with chafing, even when active all day. Plus they weigh so little. Very impressed.

A light option: 22g (women's M) and 57g (men's M). And they also come in black!

THE VERDICT: Proof that keeping things simple is the best – light, comfy, quick-drying and packable, a perfect option for travellers.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Weight: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

www.arcteryx.com



ICEBREAKER

Siren Hipkini Rosette /
Anatomica Boxers

£30 / £35

THE TEST: 'Wool with sex appeal'? These Icebreaker undies certainly don't lack colour (less bright options available!). However, on touching them you wouldn't think there was wool in them – they feel so soft and even. They are 96% merino though, so naturally wicking, odour-resistant and breathable.

SHE SAYS: These felt so good it was hard to believe the high wool count. They were very stretchy so moved well during activities; they sat well, being neither too low or too high.

The crotch section seemed a little low but the seams were flatlocked, so not a major issue.

HE SAYS: I liked the feel, and the waistband was nice and soft. I had an issue with the diagonal seam on the fly though – a potential issue, depending on which side you dress!

At 25g (women's M) and 53g (men's M) these were the second-lightest on test.

THE VERDICT: A good weight and, despite a few niggles, the fabric alone is worth the price.

IN BRIEF

Features: ★★★★★

Design: ★★★★★

Comfort: ★★★★★

Weight: ★★★★★

Value: ★★★★★

Overall: ★★★★★

uk.icebreaker.com

**LAST CHANCE
TO ENTER!**
Competition closes on 31st October 2014

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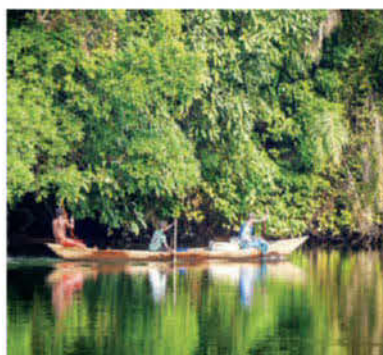
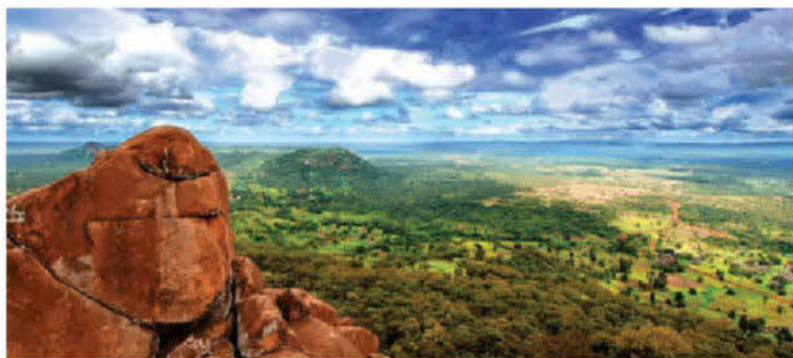
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WILD LANDSCAPES

If you imagine West Africa, you could be overwhelmed by its extraordinary colours: the brilliant flash of a parakeet's wing, the ruby-like eyes of a rocket frog, the vivid patterns of a woman's dress.

But the colours of Ghana and Senegal are so much more than these dazzling visual highlights. The clear, strong light of the West African sun brings the very land to life, giving its rich colours a remarkable and deep vibrancy.

From the bleached white sand of palm-fringed beaches to the rich red ochre of laterite roads, from the emerald green of rainforests to the straw-yellow of arid savannah, you can point your camera lens in any direction and capture a kaleidoscope of wild colour that few places on earth can match.

For exclusive flight deals for *Wanderlust* readers and all travel enquiries, please contact our partner travel agency McPhillips at info@airmcpPhillips.com or call +44 1293 822 922, or visit the website at www.gambiabird.com/adventure

NIKON CAMERA PRIZES FOR THE RUNNERS-UP

Don't fret if you don't bag the West Africa trip, *all* our Runners Up and Highly Recommended entrants will win amazing Nikon cameras. The Runners Up can get new perspectives with the Nikon D5300 D-SLR camera kit (RRP £719.99) – a lightweight model packed with creative effects, a 3.2-inch swivel screen, 24.2mp DX-format CMOS sensor and full HD filming.

Meanwhile, our Highly Recommended entrants will become proud owners of the Nikon COOLPIX P600 (RRP £359.99). For more info, head to www.nikon.co.uk



With just one week to go before the deadline passes – 31 October – this is your last call to enter the acclaimed *Wanderlust* Travel Photo of the Year competition.

So whether you've taken your trusty camera somewhere spectacular this year, or just looked back over your travel snaps and thought 'wow!' then hurry up and get sending!

Amateur photographers have the chance to be one of four winners claiming the prize of a lifetime: a photo commission (with a friend) to West Africa, courtesy of Gambia Bird Airlines. Meanwhile, a hefty £3,000 is up for grabs for the winner of our Portfolio contest.

So don't miss out – get those images over to us without delay!

Win a commission

AMATEUR COMPETITION

The four lucky winners of the Amateur categories (and their companions) will be whisked away on an incredible photographic commission to Ghana or Senegal in West Africa.

Wanderlust has teamed up with Gambia Bird Airlines (gambiabird.com) to offer this extraordinary chance to visit and photograph Accra or Dakar, and the rich landscapes beyond them.

West Africa is any budding photographer's dream; not yet awash with tourists, a diverse range of adventures can be found in just a single visit. Elephants roam the savannah, wild beaches contrast with rich jungles and lively bars nestle among classic colonial architecture, filled with energetic, friendly faces.

How to enter

Don't be afraid to get imaginative with your entries – the more creative the better! – though submissions must fit into one of four categories: People, Wildlife, Landscape or Travel Icons. The Icons category is for photos of anything that has achieved landmark status in the travel world, be that people, places or events.

One winner of each category will be announced, but for now photos may be shot anywhere and at any time, so dig through those memory cards!

Win £3,000

PORTFOLIO COMPETITION

If you're a professional photographer, not to worry, we have something special to tempt you too.

We're also on the lookout for a breathtaking set of images for our Portfolio category, which should effortlessly combine being individually striking while narrating a clear and profound story as they come together.

The portfolio competition is also open to amateurs, and the collection of five images must fall into one of our four categories: People, Wildlife, Landscape or Travel Icons. There will be just one winner, who will walk away with a cash prize of £3,000.

Send us your photos

To enter, and for full Terms and Conditions, visit www.travelphotooftheyear.co.uk. The closing date for entries is 31 October 2014.

Best of luck!



우리 100-2012년 10월 15일 경향



BEHIND THE LINE

You can't go where you like. You must have a guide.
You have to bow to the Great and Dear Leaders.
But still: is restrictive, secretive, bizarre North Korea
the world's most intriguing country?

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **M A RYDER**

W

e lined up in the hot Pyongyang sunshine facing 20m-high bronze statues of the 'Great Leader', Kim Il-sung, and the 'Dear Leader', Kim Jong-il. Recorded funeral music wafted across Mansudae plaza.

A nearby inscription read: 'Let us drive out American imperialism'.

"We must show our respect to this sacred statue," urged Guide1. With bouquet laid, we bowed deeply in unison. Welcome to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Just curious

It seemed I'd travelled back to Stalin's USSR or the demagoguery of Mao's China. In Beijing, two nights before entering the DPRK, our tour leader, Julia, had briefed us about visiting the world's most secretive state: "No leaving hotels without a guide. No photos of soldiers. No smirking at memorials. No creasing newspapers featuring images of Kim Jong-un – you can be arrested for that."

Strictly itemised group travel is the only way to see this totalitarian autarky sandwiched between eastern China and South Korea. So I'd joined a group of eight travellers and was on my way in. As you might imagine, journalists are frowned upon, so I concealed my occupation from our two enchanting local Korean guides. Guider and Guide2 waited for us at Pyongyang Airport – and certainly weren't the automaton minders I'd expected.

Testimonies given by defectors condemn North Korea as a serious human rights abuser: a country that indoctrinates citizens from birth into the Kim personality cult; that detains and executes dissenters in inhumane labour camps; that, spurred by its failed socialist policies, has caused its people to endure famine and starvation.

So was it ethically right to be visiting – and thus handing over hard currency to – this international pariah?

However hard I moralised about this I couldn't dress up my justification for going as anything other than selfish curiosity. I wanted to see it with my own eyes, drawn by DPRK's unremittingly negative and often bizarre publicity. Also, is imposing isolation on a country already suspicious of foreigners a helpful way forward?

Guider laughed when I said I'd heard that North Korean men were required to get Kim Jong-un haircuts: "That's your propaganda. Tell me if you see anybody with this haircut." I never did.

Big Brother is watching...

Showcase capital Pyongyang immediately triggered flashbacks of the Moscow I once visited pre-perestroika.

It was a vertical, airy city of grandiose squares, fountains, parks and marble-clad monuments, with apartment blocks organised as urban collectives incorporating government shops that ration everything from rice to state-manufactured underwear. Broad avenues with little traffic rattled to occasional antique Czech trolleybuses. Everywhere, Big Brother watched on. Giant billboards in Socialist Realist style depicted the omnipresent Kim Il-sung alongside militaristic murals of revolutionary fervour and anti-imperialist slogans.

Many comrades wore uniforms: from marching soldiers in khaki to Youth League schoolchildren in red neckerchiefs and blue- ►

Splashdance
The dancing ladies of Mansudae's fountain are often dwarfed by the 25m bursts of water





Glorious propaganda

(clockwise from this) The 60m Arch of Triumph was erected to celebrate Kim Il-sung's 70th birthday; a DMZ soldier; the Juche Tower dominates the Taedong River's skyline; a propaganda poster in Wonsan





‘In Pyongyang, giant billboards in Socialist Realist style depicted the omnipresent Kim Il-sung alongside militaristic murals of revolutionary fervour and anti-imperialist slogans’

◀ suited traffic ladies twirling their batons. Above all, Pyongyang was spotless – and oddly empty given its reputed three million inhabitants. Those inhabitants are said to be the privileged caste of the ruling Workers’ Party possessing a positive *songbun* – filial loyalty towards the regime accrued over family generations.

We were accommodated in the colossal 47-floor Yanggakdo Hotel, which sits on an island in the River Taedong (thus ensuring we couldn’t go walkabout). The hotel’s entertainment complex is the opium of the tourist masses: ten-pin bowling, karaoke, a casino and cheap beer to keep us amused while Pyongyang slept. My 19th-floor view over Taedong’s skyscraper-fringed riverbank was ever so slightly Manhattan.

During three days in Pyongyang there was no escaping the Great Leader’s gaze. Pyongyang’s supersized Arch of Triumph glorified Kim Il-sung’s revolutionary path towards liberation from Japan. We were pinpricks on the immense 75,000 sq m Kim Il-sung Square (site of goose-stepping military extravaganzas). We visited Kim’s idyllically propagandised birthplace, an immaculately reconstructed adobe-walled farmstead.

The most propaganda-drenched experience was the bombastic Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum, recently opened to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Korean War’s end in 1953.

A young female army guide offered a partisan slant on the war, not least underplaying China’s intercession to ensure the stalemate between the two Koreas that remains today.

We were shown around captured American military hardware used by the “puppet South Korean regime”, including an American spy ship, *USS Pueblo*, genuinely caught snooping off the coast in 1968. A drawer in the map room marked “TOP SECRET” possibly gave the Americans’ game away.

On another day we took in citywide views from the 170m-high Juche Tower. It commemorates Kim Il-sung’s state philosophy, Juche, a nationalistic self-determination preaching that Koreans must be masters of their own destiny without foreign interference. “We must fight against domination by foreign imperialists and their flunkies,” the tower guide demanded.

Fear factor?

An accusation levelled against visits to DPRK is that the Koreans you meet are actors. “People say we’re just robots and spend our whole life living in fear but it’s untrue,” insisted Guide1.

Building a rapport with our guides was the highlight of my stay. They were intelligent, mischievous, funny; they liked to tease their charges. Whether they responded to more serious questions ►



Hammer and cycles
A local bikes past a billboard in Kaesong; (left) the view from Pyongyang's regular base for Westerners, the Yanggakdo Hotel



Fact and frictions

(clockwise from this)

Captured in 1968, the USS Pueblo is now a tourist attraction at the Pyongyang War Museum; an iced noodle dish; a Mangyongdae guide shows visitors around Kim Il-sung's birthplace; Mangyongdae funfair was recently spruced up under orders from Kim Jong-un



◀ with true belief or scripted indoctrination is impossible to say, but they spoke more candidly than imagined on some issues. For instance, when we asked about North Korea's terrible famines of the 1990s, Guide1 admitted, "Life was difficult then. We suffered shortages because of the collapse of the USSR's international socialist market and droughts."

However, a bedrock of party loyalty lay beneath their easy charm. Both explained that they volunteered for work details in rice paddies on collective farms. "It's our duty," said Guide1. "If you do not work to produce food, you do not eat." On another occasion, Guide2 casually observed: "I like Americans, they're cool, but they're imperialists who want to hurt our country."

Having visited South Korea in the past, I noticed that shared cultural traits persevere despite the two nations' divided political systems. For instance, in Peony Hill Park we encountered a wedding, and the bride was wearing the traditional *Chosŏn-ot* Korean dress, just as you'd see in South Korea. Meals were similar too – as in South Korea, the norm here is to eat communally with multiple dishes; we ate classics familiar from the South, such as cook-your-own duck *bulgogi* (barbecue) and *kimchi* (fermented pickle), which appeared with every meal – even breakfast.

Sometimes the leash loosened. We joined commuters for a five-station ride on Pyongyang's stunningly ornate subway – much like Moscow's, with chandeliers, marble pillars and revolutionary murals. At the retro Mangyongdae Funfair, we rode the rollercoaster as out-of-town Koreans, unused to foreigners, called 'Ni Hao' (Hello in Chinese). This particular foreign imperialist then reassured a watching crowd of the West's military capability by missing all ten shots on the air-rifle shooting range.

Heritage big hitters

After exploring Pyongyang, we drove 2.5 hours south down a deserted freeway to near Kaesong, where tensions manifest between the two Koreas along the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). We broke the journey at the Hyonjongrŭng Tombs. With North Korea so couched in anti-imperialist dogma it's easy to overlook the fact that several millennia of royal rule once unified Korea.

The grass-mound tombs of King Kongmin (1351-1374), 31st monarch of the Koryŏ Dynasty (AD 918-1392), and his Mongolian wife, rest on a wooded hillside. Carved stone sentinels of soldiers and scholars guard them – although they failed miserably to stop the Japanese looting the tombs in 1905. Guide2 explained that feng shui determined the tombs' location: "If the king didn't like the choice he would kill those who chose it." Absolutism runs through Korean history.

Former royal capital Kaesong has other UNESCO World Heritage-listed treasures such as a private Confucian school, where a museum hosts exquisite centuries-old celadon ceramics and brass weaponry. The Ri Dynasty (1392-1905) is represented in the 14th-century Namdae Gate, with its 14-tonne bronze bell adorned with Buddhist iconography.

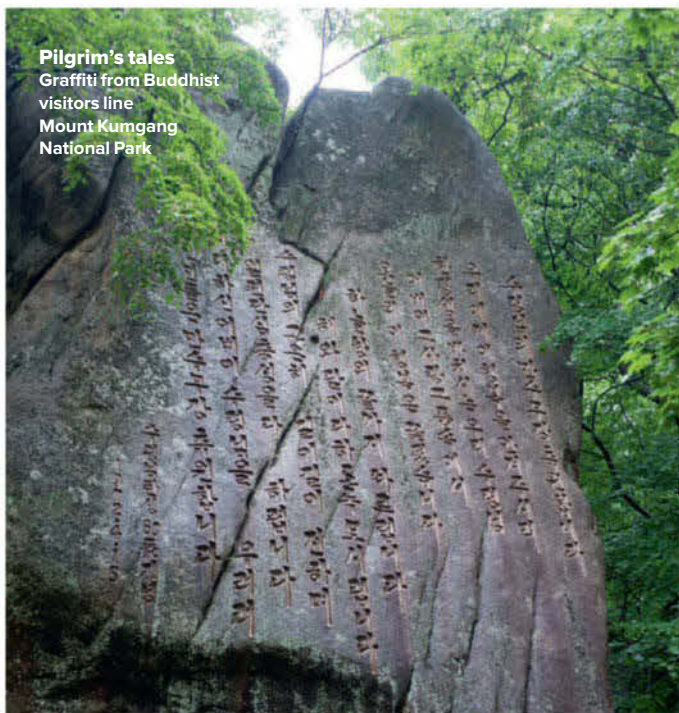
Buddhism persists in North Korea, Guide1 told us. I suggested that this seemed unlikely. "Oh yes," Guide1 insisted. "We have these monks. They are old. I have heard them chanting... blah, blah, blah. They sound really boring."

"We will destroy them"

A further 8km from Kaesong is the DMZ at Panmunjom: the world's most militarised border. At Panmunjom's briefing centre, another soldier-guide with an exaggeratedly peaked cap explained that the ►



Grand central station
Pyongyang Metro takes
its magnificent style
from the Soviet template



Pilgrim's tales
Graffiti from Buddhist
visitors line
Mount Kumgang
National Park

'The pathway at Mt Kumgang National Park was inscribed with beautiful calligraphy left by Ri Dynasty Buddhist pilgrims en route to the 74m-high Kuryong Waterfall'

Wonsan. Kim, a woman in her 50s, guided us around geometrically neat paddies that fluttered with red flags. We visited a community shop selling dried persimmon, and a school where children waited to sing for us. She told us that ten villages form this collective, arranged into teams with production quotas. They keep 60% of their rice to share among the workforce while the state buys 40% for distribution.

Like all North Koreans we met, Kim dutifully recalled Kim Il-sung's words and deeds with biblical devotion. "He came here 50 years ago and described our collective as paradise," she purred. "He asked us how many fruits on this persimmon tree? We said 500 but he insisted 800. We counted 803 and were amazed." She said they would work hard to increase productivity for when Marshal Kim Jong-un visited.

Kim also took us into her frugal little house, which was swathed by her own, much-loved garden of aubergines and cabbages. She showed us pictures of her family and told us with pride – like any mother – about her children's university education.

A face to the name

In North Korea's deep south-west is Mt Kumgang National Park. The North shares the park with South Korea – though pink-tracksuited hiking guide, Dae, insisted that the DPRK has the most beautiful side.

Kumgang's rocky mountainsides were draped in forests of magnolia, maple and pine, and incised by serene gullies with natural swimming holes named things like 'floating jade'. The pathway was inscribed with beautiful Japanese and Korean calligraphy left by Ri Dynasty Buddhist pilgrims en route to the 74m-high Kuryong Waterfall where nine mythological dragons are said to inhabit the plunge pool.

Modern hotels near Kumgang sit idly empty. A tall, green, wire fence hems the road all the way to the South Korean border at Sokcho. For a decade until 2008, during an interlude in hostilities, South Koreans arrived here to be reunited with relatives they hadn't seen since partition in the 50s. The shooting of a South Korean tourist curtailed this accord in 2008.

Exiting North Korea I wondered for how much longer travellers would have the opportunity to witness this anachronism of totalitarian communism, elsewhere confined to the footnotes of 20th-century history? It is easy to revile and laugh at North Korea from afar but it felt right to have visited, to put human faces and emotions to some of those who have to live in this state.

Service 51 departed Pyongyang Railway Station for the 1,349km train journey to Beijing. For five hours we trundled westwards, past glassy rice paddies, to the border at Sinuiju. At immigration, the guard shook our leader Julia's hand and politely said goodbye; no one had their camera memory cards deleted.

Crossing the bridge over the River Yalu into China, the neon glass-fronted waterfront of Dandong gleamed with economic progress. Looking out I saw Dandong's traffic jams and thriving free enterprise. Just five hours away – but a different world. ■

◀ DMZ stretches 246km across the Korean peninsula and is roughly 4km wide. His rhetoric ramped up nicely: "No heavy weaponry or aggressive actions are allowed inside the DMZ," he said, "but the South Koreans ignore this."

We were marched towards the Armistice Hall, where an end to the Korean War was negotiated in 1953. An American tourist (being slightly risqué) asked, "Why wasn't your great Kim Il-sung here for the armistice signing?"

"Why wasn't your President Eisenhower here?" the guide retorted. Touché.

In the Joint Security Area, the border itself runs through several blue huts; inside, I crossed the border by circumnavigating a meeting table. South Korean flags were flying but there was no sign of their troops.

Meanwhile, the soldier-guide posed awkward questions to us. "What do they say about us in your country?" he barked.

"Err... well... Of course, we recognise you have a very different system, and..." I was rambling. Would a careless response land me on the first plane home?

"Why does your country take part in aggressive actions towards North Korea?" he continued.

I blathered on about paranoia of communism and not judging people by their political masters. He laughed. He'd heard it all before and knew exactly what the West's view was on North Korea. "If the Americans ever try to invade we will destroy them with one-party unity and reunify Korea by force," he ended, chillingly.

Life on the farm

The most striking impression gained by speeding around the countryside south of Pyongyang on a tour bus was of an intensely agrarian society. Every inch of flatland in this mountainous nation coalesces into a watery horizon of rice paddies. We saw labour-intensive work details (often soldiers) weeding the paddies; there were more ox-driven ploughs than tractors; loud mobile speakers exhorted workers with rousing music. Farm villages rose out of the paddies; each had its own obligatory obelisk, inscribed with the sayings of Kim Il-sung alongside billboards of him dispensing advice to farmers.

Our tour included an undoubtedly polished insight into rural life by visiting a 6.5 sq km collective farm called Tun Tan towards

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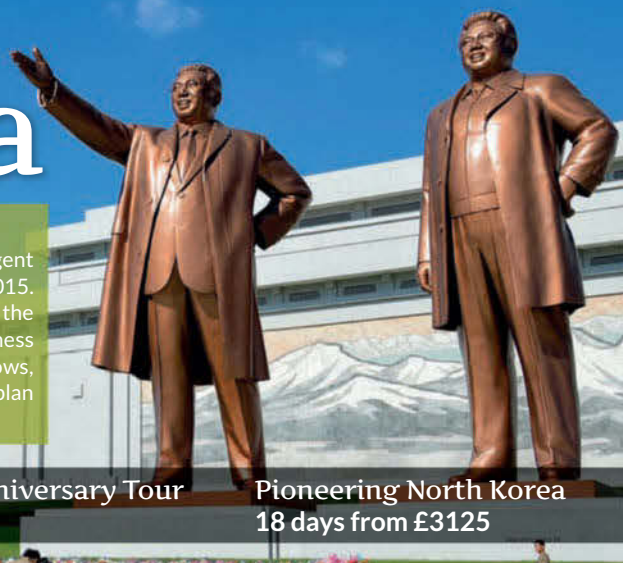
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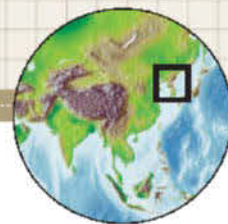
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North Korea Footnotes

VITAL STATISTICS

Capital: Pyongyang
Population: 24.8 million
Language: Korean
Time: GMT+9
International dialling code: +850
Visas: Required by UK nationals. A letter of invitation stating you are part of a tour is required, plus €50. The travel permit will be issued in Beijing before onward travel to Pyongyang. UK nationals can stay in Beijing visa-free for up to 72 hours.
Money: Won (KPW), around 230KPW to the UK£. No ATMs exist inside DPRK. Credit card use is non-existent. Tourists must use (small note) denominations of euros, US dollars or Chinese yuan.

When to go

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec

- Springtime is pleasant. Events include Kim Il-sung's birthday (15 Apr) and the Pyongyang marathon.
- Pyongyang can be hot (25–30°C) but also wet. Significant days may generate a Mass Games (*Arirang*) at the May Day Stadium – 15 Aug 2015 marks the 70th anniversary of liberation day.
- Cooler and drier temperatures. National Day (9 Sept) is often celebrated lavishly.
- Winters can be harsh and cold (–0°C).

Health & safety

Consult your GP. Japanese encephalitis can occur; malaria is low-risk. Medical facilities may be poor outside of Pyongyang. Don't drink tap water. Most visits are trouble-free but you straying from the rules can land you in trouble.

Further reading & information

North Korea (Bradt, 2014)
Nothing to Envy (Barbara Demick, 2010) and **North Korea: State of Paranoia** (Paul French, 2014) – read before you go as both unlikely to pass censorship upon entry.

More online

Visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/151 for links to more content:

ARCHIVE ARTICLES

- ◆ 9 things you must do in Pyongyang – online exclusive
- ◆ 6 things I wish I'd known about North Korea – online exclusive

PLANNING GUIDES

- ◆ North Korea travel guide

THE TRIP

Explore (0844 499 0901, explore.co.uk) offers a 12-day small-group Inside North Korea tour. The trip costs from £3,257 including international flights, three nights in Beijing, seven nights full-board in DPRK, one night's train accommodation, ground transportation and a tour leader with local guide support.



Getting there

Air China (airchina.co.uk) flies direct from Heathrow to Beijing from £600 return; flight time around ten hours.

From Beijing most travellers fly to Pyongyang using **Air Koryo** (www.airkoryo.com.kp/en), usually included in your tour. Flight time is two hours.

Alternatively, the **train** between Beijing and Pyongyang, via the border towns of Dandong and Sinuiju takes around 23 hours in comfy four-berth sleeper cabins.



Getting around

Barring the train journey (*above*), all travel in North Korea will be by tour bus. An exception is **Pyongyang's Subway** system (www.pyongyang-metro.com), which has two lines and 17 stops.



Cost of travel

Virtually **everything will be covered in your tour**. Drinks and souvenirs are cheap. A coffee might cost 50p, 750ml beers start at £1, bottles of soju rice-spirit cost £3–4. I gained a **small advantage using US dollars**: often a seller would quote a price in euros; when I said I had dollars, they sometimes offered the same price.



Accommodation

Individual travellers are unable to book hotels. Provincial hotels are more rustic than those in Pyongyang.

Hotel Yanggakdo (Pyongyang) is a monolith with a revolving restaurant on the 47th floor; BBC World available.

Kaesong Folk Custom Hotel (Kaesong) is a collection of old-style houses from the Ri Dynasty; guests sleep on futons behind wood-and-paper screen walls.

Tongmyong Hotel (Wonsan) is another skyscraper with a pastel exterior and fine views along Wonsan's coast.

Sijung Guesthouse (Lake Sijung) is a small, concrete, lakeside hotel with cozy rooms and mud-bath treatment rooms.



Food & Drink

Cuisine is based around **small dishes**. Special preparations include cook-your-own hotpot, cold *naengmyun* noodles, and banquets called *pansanggi*, featuring multitudinous dishes. *Kimchi* (fermented pickle) is omnipresent. Beer is abundant: the brand **Taedonggang** is a British brew now only produced in DPRK.

TIMELINE: DPRK'S REVOLUTIONARY PATH

1910 Japan invades and annexes Korean peninsula, ending rule of Ri Dynasty (in power since 1392).

1925 Korean Communist Party forms opposition to Japanese. Armed resistance begins from guerrilla fighters as Kim Il-sung emerges.

1945 After WWII Japanese occupation ends. The USA, concerned about spreading communism, splits Korea along the 38th Parallel; the USSR occupies the North, the USA occupies the South.

1948 Kim Il-sung becomes president of new Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

1950 Several years of tension regarding reunification explodes: on 25 June, North Korea invades the South.

1950–53 Korean War. After initial success taking Seoul and driving south, DPRK forces are pushed north with American intervention before Chinese intervention achieves gridlock around the 38th Parallel. Armistice signed 27 July 1953.

Mid-1950s onwards Kim Il-sung's rule becomes increasingly authoritarian, isolationist and centralised under his Juche philosophy. Initially DPRK outstrips South Korea's economic performance but is then left behind.

1987 DPRK bombs Korean Air flight as tensions resurface.

1994 Death of Kim Il-sung, aged 82.



1994–98 Famine kills an estimated 10% of population during DPRK's self-proclaimed 'Arduous March'.

1997 After three years of national mourning, Kim Jong-il, son of Kim Il-sung, officially becomes party General Secretary.

2000 Rapprochement with South leads to joint protocol to discuss reunification. Cross-border visits permitted.

2008 Tensions resurface between Pyongyang and Seoul as fears about the North's nuclear ambitions rise.

2011 Kim Jong-il dies. His son, Kim Jong-un, an unknown quantity, becomes leader.

2012–2014 Purges inside DPRK and missile-tests characterise Kim Jong-un's early rule as he wins national election with 100% vote.





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Supplier bankruptcy

In 2011, 24 holiday companies collapsed; in 2010, it was a huge 239. Which just highlights the importance of being insured for such provider failures. Insure & Go's **Supplier Insolvency add-on** (included in Gold, Platinum and Black policies; not available in others) gives cover in the event that travel providers, including suppliers of hotels and car hire, become insolvent.

Also, Insure & Go's **Scheduled Airline Failure Insurance**

(included in all policies) means that you are protected if the scheduled airline you've booked on goes under. Perfect peace of mind in these testing times.

Natural disasters

If the word Eyjafjallajökull sends shivers down your spine, this is the cover for you. Insure & Go's **Travel Disruption add-on** includes any claims directly or indirectly caused by any extraordinary atmospheric, meteorological, seismic or geological phenomenon. That means ash clouds, meteorites, tsunamis, earthquakes and other trip-bothering natural upsets.

Civil unrest

Insure & Go's **Travel Disruption policy-extra** also covers claims made in the event of civil unrest erupting at your destination. Be it organised protests, riots, arson,

looting, border infringements or armed insurrection (except where civil war has been declared), you can rest assured your travels will be covered.

Camera cover

Got a nice bit of photography kit? Insure & Go can offer **extra cover for cameras**, so you feel safe while out taking those shots. You can add-on insurance for kit worth up to £1,000 (£1,000 per body and £1,000 per lens if bought separately) for a small supplement. For example, to cover a one-year-old £700 camera for 30 days can cost from just £35.

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Wanderlust

FROM THE ROAD

Letters, tips, photos & exploits from you, our endlessly adventurous readers

■ Your Story

Climbing Mt Toubkal, against all odds

Reader Captain Tony

Harris lost a leg in combat, but was determined not to let that stop him scaling the roof of North Africa



For months there was a sense of impending doom in the Harris household. Why had we chosen to climb 4,000m Mt Toubkal? Why were we doing it in August, when it might be above 40°C? Would we be able to fundraise £2,000 for Help for Heroes and BLESMA? These questions still hung in the air on the day that my wife Elizabeth and I flew to Marrakech, to begin the climb that neither of us thought possible just five years ago.

In 2009 I was a serving Infantry Officer in the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers on operations in Afghanistan. On 21 May 2009 my vehicle hit a bomb near Sangin in Helmand Province. The effects of the blast saw me evacuated to the UK; I underwent more than 20 operations to save my left leg before it was eventually amputated. I never thought it would be possible to climb a mountain the size of Toubkal, but with some encouragement from *Wanderlust* and KE Adventure Travel, my wife and I decided it would be our great adventure and that together we could overcome the challenges.

We flew to Marrakech with Royal Air Maroc and, at 8am the next day, started our journey to Imlil in the High Atlas. Imlil's streets buzzed with trade, mules and many walkers – either preparing to make their ascent or flushed from having just done so. Mustapha, our guide, introduced us to our muleteer, Driss, who stowed our kit on his mule. Then we began the 16km hike that would see us climb 1,500m to our overnight refuge at the base of Mt Toubkal.

Despite the 30°C heat, the going was good over dirt tracks and rocky paths. Local shepherds were occasionally spotted high

on the mountains that flanked the trail. The air was filled with the chatter of birds and city folk on their holidays making the trip to the shrine at the village of Aroumd, some way below the Toubkal range.

Every two hours we stopped so I could carry out essential maintenance on my stump: drying the sweat off, applying talc, ensuring it hadn't got larger or smaller due to the temperature. With each mile, we got closer to lunch. We were amazed when our muleteer, who had sped off, greeted us with one of the best tagines I've ever tasted – all prepared from the back of a mule!

After eating we set off up the steeper track to the refuge, dodging the mules on their way back down. The track narrowed and our legs were tired, but by 5pm we had reached our destination – after seven hours of arduous walking. The refuge had simple dorms, showers, electricity from its own hydroplant and (if you stood in one incredibly specific place) phone reception.

Over a surprisingly excellent dinner, Mustapha talked about our ascent and descent the next day. I was amazed at how well my leg had done so far, although I was glad for my wife's massaging efforts on my damaged ankle. Sleep came quickly, and we dreamed of completing our ascent.

Our alarms woke us at 4am; after a brief breakfast we began our ascent. The darkness and altitude ensured that the temperature was cool, and we made steady progress through the first 200m. But as we cleared the boulder field and went to enter the valley that would lead us onto the ridge below Toubkal, we were all knocked flat by a gusting wind. We had to hold on to the rocks, and the wind crashed through our



Top of the world
Tony, Liz and Mustapha made it to the summit of Toubkal – but then there was the challenge of getting back down...

clothing and chilled us to the bone. More warm kit was applied, and we drove on. The constant barrage made us slower, but at least we didn't have to stop to clean the sweat from my stump.

As the sun crept over the mountains, the valley came alive and we found renewed vigour. Just four hours after setting out, we were within a few hundred metres of the summit. Then we both broke on to the small plateau that is the top of Toubkal.

I cannot tell you how elated we felt after five years believing that it would be near impossible for my foot to put up with a 4,000m climb. In just 24 hours we had managed it with the help, encouragement and support of our KE Adventure guide Mustapha. The view was incredible, with sheer drops, weather-beaten valleys and majestic peaks surrounding us. In some directions you could see for hundreds of miles; in others there were more mountains, challenging you to climb them. It was breathtaking.

After the obligatory photos, it was time to begin the most challenging part of our journey: the descent. Both Liz and I knew that this was going to be a gruelling test of mind over matter; my prosthetic leg wouldn't be stable on the loose terrain so

my damaged right leg would have to bear the majority of the load. Mustapha came to the rescue again by roping me on to him and taking a portion of the weight every time we came to a suitably large drop or when my feet slid from under me.

As we slowly made our way back down, the temperatures rose and my leg got sweatier, but it was as if every other climber knew how to keep us going: we were greeted with rounds of applause and praise whenever we encountered another group. To all those strangers I can only say thank you: you helped more than you'll ever know.



We paused at the refuge for lunch before ploughing on down, ignoring the pain from my bloodied stump and the fatigue of walking 48km in 36 hours. If I slowed, Mustapha was there with a cry of "Agado!" – a word typically used to spur on mules, but appropriate given the situation.

We edged closer to Imlil. The temptation to ask for a mule was always there, but I persevered until eventually we were back where we'd started the day before. We were tired but unbeaten.

Climbing a 4,000m peak was my biggest physical challenge since I lost my leg, but it was hugely rewarding and has given me an insight into my determination to succeed. It has also prepared me mentally for the Invictus Games [Tony was in the GB Sitting Volleyball team at the inaugural games for wounded service personnel, held in London in September; the team won gold].

My sincerest thanks to KE Adventure Travel, our guide Mustapha, our muleteer Driss, *Wanderlust* and Royal Air Maroc for making this ambition a reality. If you'd like to support our fundraising, please visit virginmoneygiving.com/AnthonyHarris4

Post your own travel tale on:
wanderlust.co.uk/mywanderlust ►



LETTERS

Your mail and missives: this issue, cheers for China, cool big cats, wonderful Norway, Nile swims and why you really need to travel solo

◀ Going solo

I saw your article saying how solo travellers should be congratulated, not made to pay more [*Departures*, issue 150]. In the past I have paid single supplements and had a single room or cabin on a Nile cruise. So why am I paying more?

If you wait for someone to go with you, you will always regret not making that jump. Whether you opt for the safety of a group tour or literally go alone, you don't have to spend thousands. Your article of solo travel shows a trip to the Galápagos for over £4,500. Nice, if you have it... I used Andean Trails to plan a trip to Peru; it arranged transfers, tickets and flights, all by email. A great service, highly recommended.

People will always talk to you, whether you want them to or not. I often let other solo travellers make that distinction. If you need to talk to people and want to interact, opt for a group tour and someone will always help you out. If you want to do it alone, do it. Take the plunge and visit wherever you can. You are a long time dead.

Gail Ashington, Staffordshire

Making savings on anti-malarials

Having read both previous letters on this subject, [*Issues* 147 and 149], we found that Asda now sells the generic version of Malarone – known as atovaquone/proguanil – for £1 a tablet. You make an appointment, fill in an online questionnaire with the

★ STAR LETTER ★

Chuffed with China

I'd been on the lookout for a decent guide to China for a while and *Wanderlust's* 'China: Trip Planner' [*September*, issue 149] succeeded where, say, a rival magazine failed in their recent features on Shanghai and Beijing.

A budding sinologist such as myself learned a great deal from Simon Lewis's feature, not least about the Great Wall, and a great itinerary – 'East to West' – which directs readers to the lesser-known parts of the icon.

It's no exaggeration to say that the rich and unique article has assisted my efforts in discovering the richness and uniqueness of China.

Thank you, *Wanderlust*.

Lee P Ruddin, Cheshire



pharmacist for 15 minutes and then buy as many as you need. No need to visit your doctor (who will charge you £10/20 for a prescription) or buy online. The pharmacist told us that Asda is selling them at a loss to get the product out there; it has just signed for another year's supply at that price.

I had a great trip to Gambia, no side affects and saved a few quid at the same time!

Geoff & Sophie Davies, Market Harborough, Leicestershire

Nile swimming

I was interested in the letter in the Sept issue [*Ask the experts*, issue 149] about whether water is safe to swim in. Recently, I really wanted to jump into the Nile just south of Luxor, but

didn't want to face my mum if I caught schistosomiasis (bilharzia) so didn't dare risk it!

The river seemed a lot cleaner than it used to be. So, putting aside questions of getting hit by a boat or whether the local police would yell at me, is it actually clean enough to swim in these days?

Suzanne Arnold, Surbiton

Schistosomiasis is certainly in the Nile; that the river is less polluted now is in the parasites' favour. However, a quick plunge (less than romins), vigorous towelling and an application of DEET insect repellent all over should cut the risk right down. There might also be a risk from attack by Nile crocodiles too. – Dr Jane Wilson-Howarth

WIN WANDERLUST GOODIES

Each issue, our winning contribution wins a haul of *Wanderlust* gear. This time, congratulations to Lee!



Experiences JUST BACK FROM...



Norway
Wanderlust
reader Kathryn
Downs has just
completed a 15-day trip
from Bergen to Lofoten

The highlight: It's not possible to describe such a big country in one highlight! But seeing a sea eagle swoop a fish next to the car in Lofoten was one of them.

Must see: Don't just stick to the Hurtigruten boat cruise, as lovely as it is. Driving through central Norway is amazingly scenic: Bodø's Aviation Museum is really quite stunning, and Lofoten is beautiful when the sun goes down, as the mountains turn red.



Top tip: Be prepared to not want to come home.

Cautionary tale: Check how far the platform is from the train door. They have dips for crossing and we unwittingly had a long drop getting off in Mosjøen.

I wish I'd known... That you could sea kayak in Lofoten.

Anything else? Be aware that smaller museums, mainly in Bergen, tend to have the English translation in a book so be prepared to read a lot.

This month you have been mostly...

W Flying over the erupting Holuhraun lava field (Iceland) in a Cessna was awe-inspiring.

satkinson

T Reading the Oct issue. Got to love a mag that does a piece on Nagorno-Karabakh. *@willhide*

W Walking around Calcutta: it's just an amazing city, one of my favourites in India, can't wait to go back. *mattyboy876*

f Sharing tips on India by train: just sit back and enjoy the journey – the sights and sounds are amazing. We did three days and it was wonderful, an experience I will never forget. Always try to book first class though for a more comfortable experience.

Tobys Proud Mummy

T Ticking off our 100 greatest travel experiences, one by one. 11 done, just 89 to go! Next up, climbing Kilimanjaro #bringiton #loveanadventure. *@Loopy279*

f Offering passport advice. Always scan in your passport (and any other important documents) and email them to yourself. *Alison Telfer*

T Dreaming of Central America with @wanderlustmag in my hammock! *@ishipley805*

W Hiring a car in Satun, Thailand. Driving to the mountains, rivers and waterfalls of this untouristy province. Only other travellers were TEFL teachers and the occasional yachtie. No coach tours, no big hotels. *Liz Cleere*

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Puuurfection, Bandhavgarh National Park, India

Elwyn Metcalfe

We were asked if we wanted to go deeper into the jungle on elephant back to see the tigers. With prior warnings not to accept such an offer, but also halfway through a three-week tiger-spotting holiday – with no tigers – I accepted. After being hauled onto the giant's back we were soon bulldozing through the trees. Suddenly below us were three sub-adults: a pale beauty and two big, handsome red cats. On being disturbed, they arose and jumped atop a rocky outcrop at eye level; the pale one turned and draped her two front paws over the stones and posed.



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THE WORLD'S BEST GUIDES

Meet this year's winners! **Lyn Hughes** reveals four unsung heroes of the travel industry after a night celebrating them at the ***Wanderlust World Guide Awards 2014***

The *Wanderlust World Guide Awards* ceremony is the best and worst night of my year. On the one hand I love it.

I love the chance to honour the truly great tour guides, who so often go unapplauded; having heard all about them, I relish meeting them in the flesh, hearing their stories and being wowed by their grace and humility.

But I also dread it. Narrowing down the long-list of nominated guides is so tricky. And then deciding on just one winner is more difficult still! I swear that all of us judges have less hair and more furrow lines now that the awards are in their ninth year.

Yet, even if it does cause a few sleepless nights, I wouldn't have it any other way. I set up the World Guide Awards after the death of *Wanderlust* co-founder (and my late husband) Paul Morrison in 2004; I wanted to establish an award in his memory, one of which he would be proud.

Getty Paul was fanatical about the

importance of good guides. This year's inspirational finalists would not have been a disappointment.

The results were announced at London's Royal Geographical Society on 21 October. If you couldn't make it on the night, turn over to find out who took this year's crown...

How the winners were chosen

We asked you to nominate the outstanding guides you've travelled with – we received well over 2,000 nominations. We shortlisted these and invited further testimonials. The judging panel then met to decide who would win Gold, a £5,000 bursary; Silver £2,500; and Bronze £1,000. The bursaries, kindly supported by Swarovski Optik, are to be spent on worthwhile projects chosen by the winners. Further prizes were very kindly provided by Swarovski Optik (swarovskioptik.com), Nomad Travel Store (nomadtravel.co.uk) and Powertraveller (powertraveller.com). ►



Efrain Valles

Where he guides:
Peru

Booked through:
Amazonas Explorer
(www.amazonas-explorer.com)



'Effie' is effortlessly amazing. It seems our Gold winner can do it all: despite a difficult start in life, growing up as a street kid in Cusco, he overcame all the obstacles and went on to study at the city's Tupac Amaru university; he has now been leading treks across Peru for the past 12 years.

He also volunteers for a charity that helps impoverished girls, many of whom are victims of domestic abuse. In everything he does, he is a selfless ambassador for his country. It's telling that his own motto is: 'nothing is impossible'.

WHAT YOU SAID

"He has life-changing outlooks."

"I'd be proud to have Effie as my son – what a wonderful ambassador for his country."

"He is passionate and truly connected to his people."

"It becomes more than a tour when your guide helps facilitate the people travelling together to enjoy each other as a group."

"With Efrain you cannot help but feel safe, important, nurtured."

"He speaks and acts the Inca virtues that are dear to him – he asks his clients to stop and live in the moment; to experience, not just observe."

"We have never encountered a guide with such a personal touch."

"His dedication to the school he volunteers at is inspiring – he not only changes lives as a guide, but also for these children."

THE JUDGES' VIEW

Bill Bryson commented that Efrain was "not only an outstanding guide but an outstanding human being. His compassion shines out."

BURSARY PLANS

Efrain is on the board of the Chicuchas Wasi School for Girls. Set up 25 years ago, the project was founded to give street children an education. Effie plans to use his bursary to support the school, and the girls within it.



Charlie Jaques

Where he guides:
France

Booked through:
Back-Roads Touring
(www.backroads-touring.com)



Charlie (or CJ) didn't suddenly become a great guide. He was, you said, "born for the role." The spirit of adventure runs through his veins; in his 15 years of guiding, he's pioneered overlanding routes through Russia, Mongolia and China, used up countless passports and learned foreign languages.

But, even more notable, is his ability to take you all along for the ride. You called him "the best ever," a man able to entertain, educate, facilitate, navigate and look after a group, no matter where. He now divides his time between guiding in France and training NGO personnel for hostile environments.

WHAT YOU SAID

"He has time for absolutely everyone, and is able to engage with everyone he meets."

"Really knowledgeable, great leader, great mechanic, heaps of fun and seriously reliable at the scary times."

"He often knew more than the local guides!"

"A born entertainer."

"Diplomacy? He should have an honorary degree in it from every university in the world."

THE JUDGES' VIEW

"Another tour guide called him a 'living legend' – says it all really," said Mark Carwardine. "In fact, my only problem with Charlie is that he makes me feel inadequate!"

Derek Moore said, "It says a lot that people still raved about him after travelling with him for six whole months!"

BURSARY PLANS

CJ plans to split his bursary between two projects: Freedom from Torture and Circus Kathmandu, both in Nepal. While the former cares for victims of torture, the latter was created by survivors of human trafficking to help aid other Nepalese children through contemporary circus.



Bunyong Roern

Where he guides:
Cambodia
Booked through:
G Adventures
(www.gadventures.co.uk)



'Bun' is Cambodia. He knows the temples, where to eat, how to find the best views... if he doesn't know it, it probably doesn't exist. His impressive know-how is one of the many reasons it took him just two years to make his mark as a CEO (Chief Experience Officer) for G Adventures.

He's had a tough and tragic life – being forced to take care of his family after the death of his father – but is still one of those “rare people” who takes the rough with the smooth. He responds to hard times with nothing but “unwavering enthusiasm and charm.” You said he was “enthusiastic”, “inspiring”, and “the greatest ambassador of the country.”

WHAT YOU SAID

“There are few people that you encounter in life that make you want to live each day to its fullest. That's Bun.”

“For a man who came from a background of war and sadness,

he always had a smile on his face. He was an inspiration.”

“A great guide, sharing his story, wit and experience with empathy and humour.”

“He has forever changed my life.”

“Any traveller assigned to Bun's group has struck the travel lottery.”

THE JUDGES' VIEW

“Bunyong is a true ambassador for Cambodia, not to mention he seems to have changed a lot of lives,” said Mark Cardwardine.

“He's a candidate for sainthood!”

“He's inspirational,” said Paul Goodyer, “What these awards are about.”

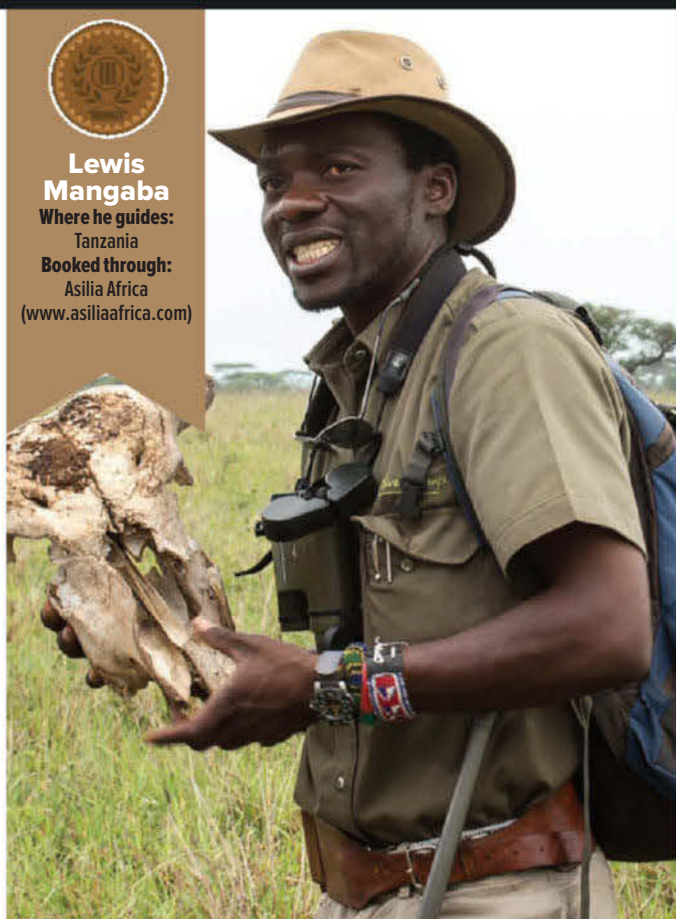
BURSARY PLANS

“I would like to open a Local Learning Center in my village in Siem Reap. There is a lot of extreme poverty here and many orphans who don't have access to basic education. This is what I want to do for my home country and children, the future generation of Cambodia.”



Lewis Mangaba

Where he guides:
Tanzania
Booked through:
Asilia Africa
(www.asiliaafrica.com)



“It is one thing to inspire guests who come to Africa, it is another to inspire guides who are immersed in nature daily.”

That's exactly what Lewis does. His unbridled passion, patience and knowledge of the bush are just the tip of the iceberg. He was, you said, “wise”, “dedicated” and “engaging”. Head of Oliver's Camp in Tarangire National Park, Tanzania, he possesses a child-like enthusiasm for wildlife.

Despite living as a homeless street child in Harare, Zimbabwe, until he was 13, he persevered with his love of nature, learning about the bush from fellow guides. There's only one thing he loves more than animals, and that's sharing his knowledge of them with others.

WHAT YOU SAID

“What an incredible man and guide! I was bowled over by his deep knowledge, contagious passion for wildlife and his ability to share his enthusiasm and insight.”

“A safari with Lewis creates lifelong memories.”

“I have never experienced the true relationship between man, animals and mother earth... until Lewis.”

“He is a source of inspiration for the Tanzania guiding community.”

“He allows others to experience and connect with the magic.”

“Meeting him enriched my life.”

THE JUDGES' VIEW

Mark Carwardine describes Lewis as “a guide's guide” and a “mentor”, adding: “He is very respected by his peers.”

Peter Antoniou added, “He is a great teacher, conservationist and a gentle soul.”

BURSARY PLANS

Lewis plans to set up a guiding school in Tanzania. “I want to help other guides to realise their full potential,” he says. “The more we are, the better for us to move forward and enrich our world.”



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THE JUDGES



Lyn Hughes
Editor-In Chief,
Wanderlust



Bill Bryson
Legendary
travel writer



Mark Carwardine
Author,
photographer
& TV wildlife
expert



Derek Moore
Travel Industry
Guru/AITO



Paul Goodyer
Co-founder,
Nomad Travel
Stores



Peter Antoniou
Swarovski
Optik



David Back
Conservation
fundraiser /
former guide

WHAT THE WINNERS DID NEXT...

How 2013's top guides spent their bursaries



GOLD Deana Zabaldo

Guides for: Mountain Madness, Nepal
(www.mountainmadness.com)

"I used the bursary to attend a Buddhist meditation retreat, to cover some expenses associated with the charitable work and fundraising that I do in Nepal, and I've also applied for and been accepted to a somatic leadership program in California for 2015. It has given me the freedom to pursue new areas of spiritual and leadership development that I feel are essential to my work as a guide, as a business coach, as a philanthropist, and as a human being."



SILVER Hossam Moussa

Guides for: Intrepid Travel, Egypt
(www.intrepidtravel.com)

"I donated the bursary to the Intrepid Foundation to use in an appropriate project that supports young children in Egypt. The Intrepid Foundation matched my donation so it means more help for more people. I was hoping to start a project to help street children or those who live in slums. Once the unrest in Egypt settles we'll be able to start or assist a project that can help these two causes. Hopefully that will be soon as the situation now is much better than before."



BRONZE Dario Ghirlanda

Guides for: Wild Frontiers, Ethiopia
(www.wildfrontiers.co.uk)

"I gave the bursary to a charity that I used to do voluntary work for while I was in high school called Cheshire Services Ethiopia. There are over six million people who are disabled in Ethiopia, representing 7.6% of the total population. Cheshire Services is an independent non-profit making organisation who provide orthopaedic and social rehabilitation services for children and young people with disabilities in Ethiopia."



COMMENDED GUIDES

Many congratulations to the following fantastic guides who also deserve a special mention:

Gill Girard, freelance, Guernsey
Chhon Chhea Yut, Angkor Walkers, Cambodia
Simon Segali, Vered Hasharon, Israel
Ronald Collado, Crees, Peru
Mehmet Gungor, Walking Mehmet, Turkey
Dingo Walsh, G Adventures, Australia
Mayer Magdy, G Adventures, Egypt



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WIN an eco-adventure to wild Malaysia

Win a trip to this beautiful, biodiverse South-East Asian hotspot with Kuoni, Berghaus and Tourism Malaysia and meet monkeys, reptiles and birds

Love nature? Then you'll love Malaysia. The South-East Asian nation has thrillingly fast-paced cities, idyllic islands and a marvellous mix of cultures, but it is also simply paradise for people who love to explore wild places – and the squawking, singing, swimming, swinging creatures that abound in them.

Why? Because Malaysia has a bit of everything. You can admire gleaming skyscrapers and graceful colonial architecture, but there's so much wilderness beyond the big hubs. There are lush jungles bursting with life. There are endless unspoilt beaches that combine sublime sand-lazing with some of the most spectacular reefs in the world. There are high mountains, offering unusual flora and fauna and opportunities for

adventure. And there are sultry waterways, where wildlife and unique tribes live together in harmony. In all, these diverse landscapes are home to over 600 types of birds and around 200 mammal species.

No matter where in Malaysia you go, or which experiences you choose, Mother Nature will be waiting with a super surprise.

Wild & wonderful

There are so many ways to go wild in Malaysia. Take Taman Negara, the peninsula's premier national park, which is home to 130-million-year-old jungle (reputed to be the world's oldest), towering trees, vibrant orchids, playful monkeys, myriad birds and the nomadic Batek tribe. Here, you can cruise the rivers, dip in

a natural 'Jacuzzi', get closer to creatures on a dizzying canopy walk, take an atmospheric night hike, sleep in an ecolodge and wake to the sounds of the rainforest.

Alternatively, you could escape from the modern world in the Danum Valley Conservation Area. This remote, complex ecosystem is a naturalist's heaven, protecting endangered wildlife species such as a banteng, Asian elephant and clouded leopard. Guided hikes will reveal Danum's secrets while high-quality ecolodges mean you can do your adventuring in style.

Or you could come face-to-unusual-face with proboscis monkey's in Sarawak's Bako National Park (around 150 of the big-nosed monkeys live here), delve into Gunung Mulu's



vast, bat-busy caves, meet tribal communities on a hike through the Kelabit Highlands, look out for orang-utans as you float along the Kinabatangan River or dive into clear-blue fish-filled waters off spots such as lovely Langkawi or the Perhentian Islands.

The best way to get the right experience is to book a trip with an expert. Kuoni has won over 170 awards for its holidays and service, and can turn your ideas into an adventure to remember. In Malaysia, Kuoni can organise a huge range of experiences, from snorkelling with hawksbills and meeting orang-utans to staying in boutique beach retreats and meeting the locals in traditional longhouses.

Gear up for a challenge

Malaysia is home to one of the highest mountains in South-East Asia: 4,095m Mt Kinabalu. Scaling this dramatic peak is a spectacular way to survey the wilds of Borneo, as well as spotting the amazing plants en route – around 6,000 species have been recorded on the slopes. It's also a fantastic challenge – it takes two days to ascend and descend Mt Kinabalu, and the feeling of

achievement will leave you feeling literally on top of the world. For an extra adrenalin-boost, you could even try the thrilling via ferrata route on the granodiorite massif.

Of course, when attempting any adventure, you need kit that you can trust to perform. Berghaus has a long history of producing gear that pushes the boundaries – and is perfect for exploring the diversity of Malaysia. Berghaus gear is tested by a team of outdoor professionals to ensure it meets the most exacting standards, whether that's on the top of Mount Kinabalu or trekking through Taman Negara's rainforest.

For example, Berghaus T-Shirt Baselayers have excellent wicking properties and feature Polygiene®, an odour-resistant technology to keep you fresher for longer – ideal for hot-humid jungle expeditions in Malaysian Borneo. Berghaus' award-winning Vapour Storm Jacket is the world's first fully venting waterproof jacket and offers unrivalled breathability while keeping you protected – perfect for hiking in rainforest.

Once you're kitted out, you're ready to fully explore wild and diverse Malaysia – the eco-experience of an adventurer's lifetime.

How to enter

Tourism Malaysia – in association with **Malaysia Airlines**, **Kuoni** and **Berghaus** – is offering one lucky *Wanderlust* reader and a friend the chance to win a wild four-night adventure in Malaysia and £500 worth of Berghaus gear. To enter, simply answer the following question:

Q: There are two Malaysian states on the island of Borneo – what are they called?

- a) Sarawak and Sabah
- b) Sarawak and Brunei
- c) Sarawak and Kalimantan

To enter, and for full terms & conditions, visit www.wanderlust.co.uk/competitions or send your answer and contacts on a postcard to the *Wanderlust* office (p2). State 'no offers' if you'd rather not be contacted by *Wanderlust* or sponsors. Closing date for entries is 26 November 2014. Prize based on two people sharing and subject to availability.

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S E C R E T

Windswept dramas. Wonderful wildlife. A spot of old-fashioned crowd-free kicking back. Whatever you hit the coast for, those hidden crescents of paradise are often travel's greatest word-of-mouth currency – here *Wanderlust* opens its wallet. Don't tell anyone...



Through the arches
Legzira's natural
landscapes have
been sculpted by
centuries of waves

B E A C H E S

Secret Beaches



1 LEGZIRA MOROCCO

BEST FOR... Atlantic rollers, red rocks, super sunsets

WHY GO? While Agadir caters to those wanting package-hol Morocco, Legzira (160km south) caters to no one. The sea rules here, smashing the sand, daring you to take a dip, and carving the cliffs into dramatic arches. Pack the camera before the cossie.

WHAT TO DO: Take a walk along the sand, making sure you take note of tides first so you don't get marooned beneath an archway. Make sure you position yourself for that perfect sunset shot, when the red rocks glow.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Hang out in faded art-deco-feel Sidi Ifni. Take a surf lesson.

GET THERE: Legzira is 10km north of Sidi Ifni.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

NORTH AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST

- **El Haouaria Plage, Cap Bon, Tunisia** Sheltered, mountain-backed, clear-watered and crowd-free
- **Nuweiba, Egypt** All the Red Sea draws (sunshine, snorkelling), minus the resorts
- **Fins, Oman** One of the deserted, turquoise-lapped beaches on the Muscat-Sur Highway



2 PARADISE BEACH, CARRIACOU GRENADA

BEST FOR... Culture, scenery, starfish

WHY GO? This beach is well-named. It's ridiculously good-looking: a mile of pristine sand, bright-green trees, gentle blue waters, islands just offshore. This is the stuff that postcards are made of yet, on a weekday, there will be no one else there.

WHAT TO DO: Take a dip. Snorkel. Look for starfish, which like to hang out in the shallows. Pinch yourself (yes, it's real).

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Quiet, laid-back Carriacou has a real Afro-Caribbean feel. Go there to lime with the locals, watch the boat-builders at work and seek out traditional drumming.

GET THERE: Carriacou is a 90-minute ferry ride from Grenada. Local buses run to Paradise.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

CARIBBEAN

- **Hampstead, Dominica** Quiet gold-and-black-speckled sand; parts of *Pirates of the Caribbean* were filmed here
- **Bones Bight, Anegada, BVI** Flour-soft sand and solitude; look out for the native rock iguana
- **Friendship Bay, Bequia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines** The largest and loveliest beach on this local-feel island



3 SALISBURY PLAIN SOUTH GEORGIA

BEST FOR... Penguins, more penguins, wow-factor

WHY GO? Simply, penguins. Over 100,000 kings (the second-largest species) gather on this raucous beach, squawking and waddling before a landscape of fearsome mountains and creaky glaciers.

WHAT TO DO: Sit down – you're not supposed to get within 5m of the penguins, but the curious birds will often approach you.


WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Immerse yourself in the Shackleton story – retrace some of the explorer's footsteps by walking from Fortuna Bay to Stromness; visit the Shackleton museum and grave at Grytviken.

GET THERE: Some cruises from Ushuaia, Argentina, include stops at South Georgia, en route to Antarctica.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

SOUTH ATLANTIC

- **Golden Harbour, South Georgia** Fur seals, elephant seals, thousands of king penguins and the lick of the Bertrab Glacier
- **Paradise Bay, Antarctica** Glaciers meet the sea and a colony of gentoo penguins
- **Bertha's Beach, Falklands** White sand frequented by abundant bird and marine life, including gentoos and dolphins



4 GREEN BOWL BEACH **BALI**

BEST FOR... Escaping, snorkelling

WHY GO? Only 20 minutes from seriously un-secret Kuta, this is a real find. It's the 300-plus steps down the cliff-face (or, more accurately, back up again) that keep the masses from Green Bowl. Those who brave the staircase will find quiet golden sand, crystal waters, crabs and starfish, and caves full of bats.

WHAT TO DO: Surf (there are good waves here). Snorkel amid colourful coral and hundreds of tropical fishes.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Visit clifftop Uluwatu Temple, which hosts nightly *kecak* (music drama) and fire-dance performances. Eat a seafood supper on Muaya Beach.

GET THERE: Green Bowl is near Uluwatu, South Kuta.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

INDONESIA & THE PHILIPPINES

- **Pulau Derawan, Indonesia**
Tiny island, green turtles, few tourists
- **Sibang Cove, Calayan, Babuyan, Philippines**
No resorts, no restaurants – feel like a true castaway
- **Kalanggaman Island, Leyte, Philippines**
Camp on this uninhabited sandbar; buy dinner from the local fishermen

Secret Beaches



5 PRAIA DA CARRAÇA, ALENTEJO PORTUGAL

BEST FOR... Coast hiking, seafood, waves

WHY GO? Leave the Algarve to the mob – head west instead, where the Sudoeste Alentejano e Costa Vicentina Nature Reserve shields a shore rich in wildflowers, birdlife (including leggy cliff-nesting storks) and hidden coves. Accessed by creaky wooden steps, Praia da Carraça is one such golden haven, but there are plenty more.

WHAT TO DO: The Rota Vicentina long-distance trail, opened in 2012, follows the Alentejo coast, giving access to countless secret beaches.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Eat fresh fish at nearby Entrada da Barca. Surfers will find many good spots.

GET THERE: The Costa Vicentina is between Lisbon and Faro; trains run from both to Funcheira (inland). Buses reach coastal villages such as Porto Covo and Odeixeix.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

ATLANTIC EUROPE

- **Ballymaddock Bay, Donegal, Ireland** Lovely, long, lauded stretch of sand
- **Grève Blanche, France** Quiet, pristine strand on Brittany's tiny Île de Batz
- **Praia das Rodas, Cíes Islands, Spain** Uninhabited marine park; dubbed the 'Galician Caribbean'



6 CALA DI CONCA CORSICA

BEST FOR... Kayaking, hiking, isolation

WHY GO? The hairy hairpin roads and crinkled topography keep crowds away from Corsica's south-east edge. Here, fragrant maquis-cloaked valleys scrunch behind an azure sea, hiding perfect portions of sand. Better, beach beauties such as Cala di Conca and Cala di Tivella can only be reached by boat or on foot, keeping them quieter still.

WHAT TO DO: Hire a kayak in Tizzano to paddle to Conca, or walk the coast path between the two (5-6hrs return) via granite outcrops, a 17th-century Genoese tower and many beaches.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Visit the secretive hilltop town of Sartène (pictured). Go wine tasting in the dramatic Vallée de l'Ortole.

GET THERE: Tizzano is a 60km drive north from the cliff-perched town of Bonifacio.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

MEDITERRANEAN & AEGEAN

- **Bidderosa, Sardinia** It's a 3km walk to reach this oasis of silver sands and pine woods
- **Golden Beach, North Cyprus** Long, miraculously untouched sweep on the Karpaz Peninsula
- **Cirali, Turkey** Home to the ancient ruins of Olympos and loggerhead turtles



7 REYNISFJARA ICELAND

BEST FOR... Drama, caves, trolls

WHY GO? Ash-black Reynisfjara Beach sits in the shadow of some of Iceland's most volatile volcanoes. It's worth risking their wrath, though, to crunch along the pitch-pebbled shore, watching guillemots and fulmars wheel among the basalt columns, and to see waves crash against the offshore rocks – allegedly trolls creeping inland.

WHAT TO DO: This isn't hidden – the Vik end of the beach, home to the best caves, is tourbus-tastic. But hit the south coast a little further west and you (or, better, your guide) can 4WD onto a seemingly endless expanse of empty ebony sand.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Take an ice-hike on Sólheimajökull glacier. Walk behind the water at Seljalandsfoss.

GET THERE: Reynisfjara is 190km from Reykjavik. A daily bus connects Reykjavik and Vik.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

SCANDINAVIA

- **Falsterbo, Sweden** Blinding-white sand; a ban on motor-craft keeps it quiet
- **Unstad, Lofoten Islands, Norway** Scenic (and chilly) surfing, under the midnight sun
- **Blåvand, West Jutland, Denmark** Search the extensive sand for amber after high tide



8 RÁBIDA, SANTA CRUZ GALAPAGOS

BEST FOR... Wildlife, red sand, solitude

WHY GO? There's only one landing site for wildlife cruisers on uninhabited Rábida and it happens to be at a maroon-coloured beach – a tint caused by high iron levels courtesy of its volcanic origins. It makes a striking, if surreal, backdrop to the basking sea lions.

WHAT TO DO: A stop here involves a wet landing on the sand; look for marine iguanas and sea lions in the caves and brown pelicans in the salt brush. Walk to the saltwater lagoon, where flamingos breed. Snorkel off the shore.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: A multi-day cruise with an expert naturalist is the way to see more of the archipelago. Not all boats visit Rábida – check your itinerary.

GET THERE: Rábida is 4.5km south of Santiago Island, only accessible by boat. Baltra island is serviced by flights from mainland Ecuador.

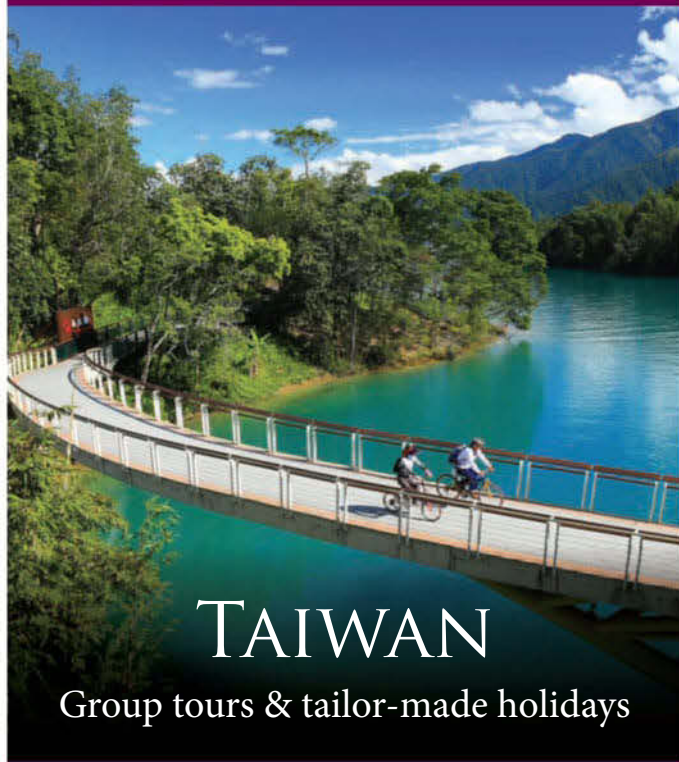
TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

SOUTH AMERICA

- **Cabo Polonio, Uruguay** Fabled fishing village, with sand dunes and sea lions
- **Arrecifes, Tayrona NP, Colombia** It's a 40-minute hike to this boulder-dotted beauty
- **Colún, Valdivia, Chile** Once voted the most hidden beach in Chile, it's backed by lagoons, and otters dabble in the river

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9 SODWANA BAY, ISIMANGALISO WETLAND PARK SOUTH AFRICA

BEST FOR... Marine life, diving, endless sand

WHY GO? The sand seems to go on forever here, as beach becomes dune, becomes coastal forest. And the water is heaving. Southern right and humpback whales cruise by (Jun-Dec); leatherbacks and loggerheads come ashore to lay; rock pools brim with tropical fish; dolphins play offshore.

WHAT TO DO: Learn to dive – Seven Mile Reef is one of the best dive sites in the world. Horse-ride along the sand or join a guided night tour, to see turtles nesting (Nov-Feb).

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Join a game drive through the Wetland Park. Kayak with hippos and crocs on Lake St Lucia.

GET THERE: From Johannesburg, fly to Richards Bay then drive to Sodwana (2hrs). Sodwana is around 350km north of Durban.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

EAST & SOUTH AFRICA

- **Tofo, Inhambane, Mozambique** Lovely sand, with whale sharks cruising by
- **Saadani, Tanzania** Big game national park with Indian Ocean frontage – combine beasts and beach
- **Vumawimbi, Pemba Island, Tanzania** Deserted sands; delve into nearby Ngezi Forest for wildlife



10 BAI SAO, PHU QUOC VIETNAM

BEST FOR... Relaxing, swimming

WHY GO? The whole island of Phu Quoc (much of which is a national park) is a beach-lover's dream. But squirrelled-away Bai Sao is pick of the bunch, its waters sheltered by the central uplands, its angle gently sloping to offshore sandbars, so you can wade waist-deep for 100m or more. Plus, working out how to get here, via a jink of hills and villages, is half the fun.

WHAT TO DO: Hire a motorbike. Find Bai Sao (ask a local for directions). Then relax. Take a dip, have a drink. Relax some more.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Barter for goodies at Duong Dong market. Hire a boat from An Thoi Town, to explore more hidden bays.

GET THERE: Phu Quoc is a 50-minute flight from Ho Chi Minh City. Bai Sao is a twisty 27km motorbike ride from main hub Duong Dong.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

INDOCHINA

- **Con Dao, Vietnam** One-time prison island turned tropical retreat; loads of brilliant beaches
- **Kep, Cambodia** Not the best beach, but the best seaside ambience: crumbling French villas, not a tat-shop in sight
- **Long Set, Koh Rong, Cambodia** Calm waters that, come nightfall, glow with bioluminescent plankton

Secret Beaches



11 FUVAHMULAH ISLAND MALDIVES

BEST FOR... Cheap sand, Maldivian culture

WHY GO? This may not be the best beach in the Maldives, or the most secret. But the beauty of bumming around on Fuvahmulah is that you can get there by yourself: this still-spectacular spot is an inhabited isle, not a private resort, peopled with actual Maldivians rather than just foreign honeymooners.

WHAT TO DO: Meet people! Wander the perfect sand, dip in the Indian Ocean and take advantage of the Maldives' most authentic beach break.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Delve into the verdant interior, home to Buddhist relics and inland lakes.

GET THERE: Fly from Malé to Addu Atoll (1hr), then another flight out to Fuvahmulah (20 mins, busy with commuting traffic at weekends).

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

INDIAN OCEAN

- **Nosy Tanikely, Madagascar** Tiny marine reserve with superlative snorkelling
- **Anse Capucins, Mahé, Seychelles** Hidden beach where whale sharks hang out
- **Alankuda, Kalpitiya, Sri Lanka** Wild, windy and under-developed; ideal for kitesurfers and dolphin-spotters



12 PLAYA ARCO, MARINO BALLENA NP COSTA RICA

BEST FOR... Solitude, jungle, monkeys

WHY GO? Perhaps one of the most hidden beaches in Costa Rica, lonesome, cliff-hugged Playa Arco lies within little-visited Marino Ballena National Park, lapped by the Pacific Ocean.

WHAT TO DO: Enjoy the solitude – few people make it to Arco. Getting there involves a hill climb from Playa Ballena; look out for monkeys and parrots in the surrounding jungle. Focus your binoculars offshore too, to look for dolphins and, in Aug-Oct and Dec-April, passing humpbacks.

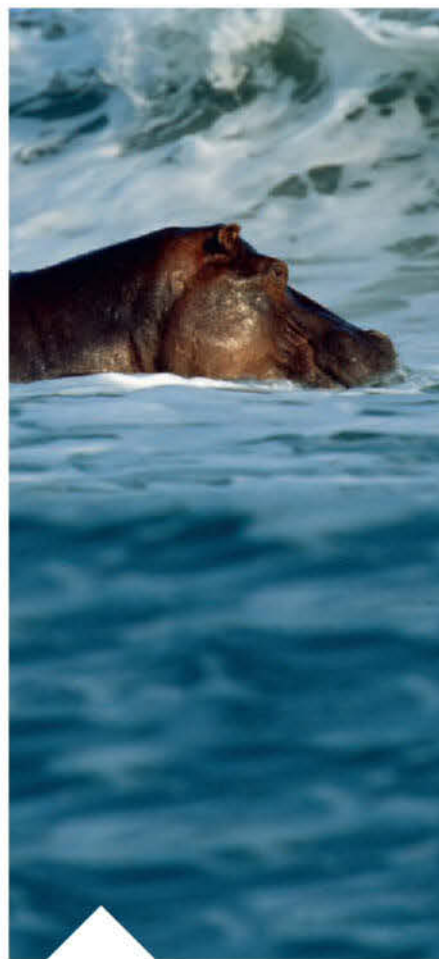
WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Have a go at stand-up paddleboarding. Nip to Hacienda Barú Wildlife Refuge (*pictured*) for animal-packed canopy walks.

GET THERE: Uvita, in Marino Ballena NP, is a four-hour drive from San José. Buses from San José to Paso Canoas stop at Uvita.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

CENTRAL AMERICA

- **Tranquility Bay, Ambergris Caye, Belize** Loved by locals and snorkellers
- **Boca Chica, Panama** Gateway port to the beaches of the Chiriqui National Marine Park
- **Water Cay, Utila, Honduras** Uninhabited, palm-treed, white-sanded cay; float over to nearby Pigeon or Jewel Cay for lunch



13 LOANGO GABON

BEST FOR... Wildlife, bragging rights

WHY GO? Hippos on the beach! Loango National Park's 100km of uninhabited coast offers the chance to see 'surfing' hippos, forest elephants, red forest buffalos and even leopards dabbling in the Atlantic. October to February is turtle nesting season too.

WHAT TO DO: Game drives are great for wildlife. Take a boat trip from Point St Catherine (Jun-Sept) for a chance to spot migrating humpbacks.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Explore – Loango NP's 1,550 sq km comprises savannah, forest and mangroves, and is home almost 200 mammal species, including western lowland gorillas.

GET THERE: Loango Lodge, briefly the park's flagship stay, closed in 2010, but is mooted to be reopened. If transportation is available, the quickest access is to fly Libreville-Port-Gentil (40mins), followed by a 3.5 hour boat trip to Omboué.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

WEST AFRICA

- **River Number Two Beach, Sierra Leone** Close to the capital, yet a tropical paradise; hire a canoe to paddle to a nearby waterfall
- **Bureh Beach, Sierra Leone** Super for surfing
- **Banana Beach, São Tomé & Príncipe** Remote and suitably yellow curve, accessed via a walk through an old plantation



14 LONG BEACH, VANCOUVER ISLAND BRITISH COLUMBIA

BEST FOR... Storm watching, beachcombing
WHY GO? OK, Long Beach isn't secret – it's been voted Canada's best on many occasions. But this wild, driftwood-scattered strand is too epic not to include.

WHAT TO DO: This is the place that popularised storm watching – go in winter for the wildest. Look out for grey whales in spring and autumn.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Embark on the 75km West Coast Trail (*pictured*) – Canada's premier hiking route starts at the end of Long Beach. Try sea kayaking in Ucluelet – black bears often trail the water's edge.

GET THERE: Long Beach is between Ucluelet and Tofino; it's a scenic five-hour drive via the Pacific Rim Highway from island capital, Victoria.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

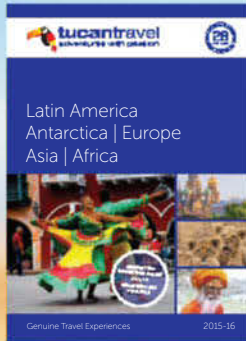
CANADA

- **Martinique, Nova Scotia** A 5km-long beach and bird sanctuary, close to Halifax
- **North Head, New Brunswick** Swept by the world's biggest tides; when the sea's out, it reveals a broad, sandy, pebbly stretch, great for beachcombing
- **Grande Échouerie, Îles de la Madeleine, Québec** Endless edge of East Point National Wildlife Reserve; explore caves at low tide



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15 PLAYA MARUATA MICHUACÁN

BEST FOR... Variety, turtles, laid-back vibe

WHY GO? Michoacán state has 250km of coast, but doesn't really shout about it – this is one of the best-preserved section of the Pacific coast. Take little-developed Playa Maruata, where you're spoilt for choice: there are three beaches here. Hit the eastern 3km-wide crescent for calm waters; the middle for slightly wilder swims; the western if you're brave – its pounding waves and dicey currents have earned it the name Playa de los Muertos.

WHAT TO DO: Come June-December to see sea turtles. Rent a hammock or cabaña to sleep by the shore. Kick back in the hippyish fishing village of Nahua.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Explore Michoacán, including UNESCO-listed colonial-style state capital Morelia (*pictured*) and the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve.

GET THERE: Maruata is at Km 150 on coastal highway 200; there are buses from Lazaro Cárdenas (4hrs south) and Tecoman (2hrs north).

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

MEXICO

- **Hidden Beach, Marieta Islands** Idyllic (and unexpected) beach within a bomb crater
- **San Ignacio Lagoon, Baja** Watch whales, birds and special sunsets from the shore
- **Punta Mosquito, Isla Holbox** Marine reserve island off Cancun with no cars; come for flamingos and watch out for mossies – it's not just a clever name



16 TE PUKATEA BAY ABEL TASMAN

BEST FOR... Kayaking, hiking, camping

WHY GO? There's a campsite (with space for just seven tents) by the curvaceous golden crescent at Te Pukatea but, warns NZ's Department of Conservation, 'this is a walk-in or boat-in campsite... there is no drive-on access'. Which sounds just about perfect to us.

WHAT TO DO: Reach the beach by hiking the 55km Abel Tasman Coast (one of NZ's Great Walks); Te Pukatea is a 30-minute detour off the Track itself. Or get there by water-taxi or kayak, to more closely enjoy the azure waters.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Shop in Nelson – the laid-back town is home to more than 350 artists and craftspeople. Go dolphin-spotting and wine-tasting in the Marlborough Sounds.

GET THERE: Marahau, the southern gateway to Abel Tasman, is 67km from Nelson.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

NEW ZEALAND

- **Hot Water Beach, Coromandel** Not super secret, but what's not to love about a beach where you can dig yourself a hot pool in the sand?
- **Mercer Bay, near Auckland** It's a perilous descent by rope to reach this (understandably) deserted, cliff-backed beauty
- **Tautuku Bay, Catlins** Perfectly symmetrical strand, backed by native forest

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17 KANTHAYA BURMA

BEST FOR... Culture, bird-spotting

WHY GO? Not so long ago, it would have seemed odd to talk of a Burma beach break. Now the country is hot stuff, and Kanthaya (otherwise – and aptly known – as Pleasant Beach) is its hottest sand. Get there before the developers do.

WHAT TO DO: Walk for miles along the deserted shore, stopping (and snacking) at fishing villages en route. Climb the hills behind the beach, for views of the sand, sea and reservoir (popular with migrating birds).

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Hire a bicycle to pedal 8km north to Sat-thwar market; barter for handicrafts and coconuts from the local Arakanese people.

GET THERE: Kanthaya is around 260km west of Yangon (*pictured*).

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

SOUTH-EAST ASIA

- **Lampi, Myeik Archipelago, Burma** Island-hop to find this remote, untainted strand
- **Koh Similan, Thailand** Like a mini-Maldives, three hours' sail from the mainland
- **Juara, Tioman, Malaysia** Under-developed and idyllic; home to a turtle conservation project



18 TAI LONG WAN HONG KONG

BEST FOR... City sand, surf, hiking

WHY GO? This is Hong Kong? Really? Tai Long Wan ('Big Wave Bay') has unspoilt sand, emerald water, good surf, views out to rugged peaks and islands, and – during the week at least – few other people.

WHAT TO DO: Walk there via the MacLehose Trail – Section 2 (Long Ke to Pak Tam Au, 13.5km) of the 100km-long hike passes the beach. Swimming isn't officially sanctioned (there are no lifeguards) but surfers certainly brave those big waves.

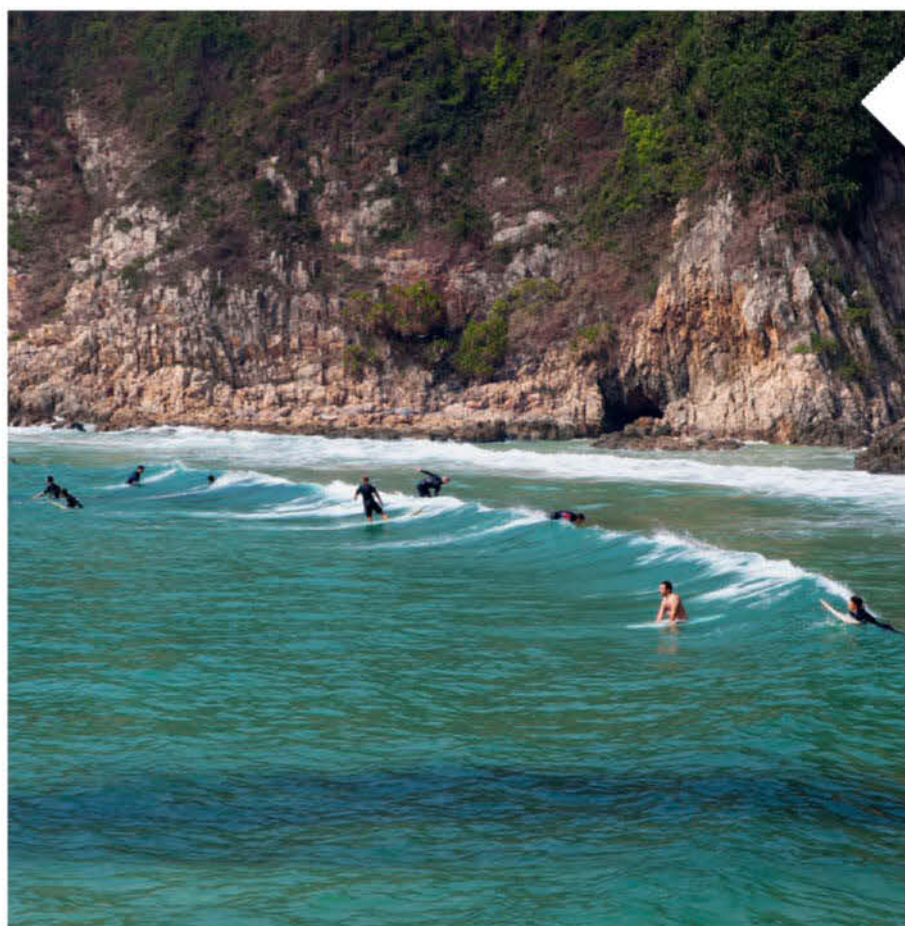
WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Ascend 958m Tai Mo Shan for views of Kowloon and Victoria Harbour. Go bird-spotting at Mai Po Nature Reserve.

GET THERE: Tai Long Wan is on the Sai Kung Peninsula, New Territories. Take a bus from Sai Kung to Pak Tam Au; the beach is a 2hr walk.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

CHINA SEAS

- **Hoshizuna-no-hama (Star Sand), Okinawa Islands** Lovely yellow sand on tiny car-free Taketomi
- **Ozuna Kaisuiyokujo, Shikoku** You won't be alone: expect sea turtles (May-Aug) and surfers
- **Longmen, Penghu Islands, Taiwan** Secluded rocky beach, on the most traditional Taiwanese archipelago



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19 LUSKENTYRE, ISLE OF HARRIS SCOTLAND

BEST FOR... Wild walking, scenery, escaping

WHY GO? Luskentyre isn't so secret – it's oft lauded as Britain's best beach, a slither of white-sand-n-turquoise Caribbean dropped in the Outer Hebrides. But, despite its fame, Luskentyre's still likely to be empty, just because Harris is so far away.

WHAT TO DO: Hike along the perfect sweep of sand and backing dunes. Glean the best view from Seilibost School, where you can look north along the sandbar, to the North Harris mountains beyond.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Continue along the coast to find more 'Caribbean' coves. Board a boat to tour the outlying islands such as St Kilda, Hirta and Dun.

GET THERE: Ferries from the mainland (Uig and Ullapool) service the connected isles of Harris and Lewis. Flights from cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh land at Lewis's Stornoway Airport.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

UNITED KINGDOM & CHANNEL ISLANDS

- **Barafundle Bay, Pembrokeshire** Sandy stunner, only accessible via the Coast Path
- **Ross Back Sands, Northumberland** Wide expanse, with views to Bamburgh Castle and Lindisfarne
- **Shell Beach, Herm** Turquoise waters, dazzling-white sand, warm climes



20 LUCKY BAY, CAPE LE GRAND NP WESTERN AUSTRALIA

BEST FOR... Kangaroos, white sand, solitude

WHY GO? This is, according to the National Committee on Soil and Terrain, officially Australia's whitest beach (apparently it's all down to the quartz-based sand). The turquoise water is just as dazzling and, better, you'll only have to share it with a few sunbathing kangaroos or, from June to December, the odd migrating whale.

WHAT TO DO: Swim and snorkel. Walk the 15km Le Grand Coastal Trail between Cape Le Grand Beach and Rossiter Bay, via Lucky. Hike up Frenchman Peak (262m) for panoramic views. Bed down at the Lucky Bay campground.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Cruise the 100-plus pristine islands of the Recherche Archipelago. Visit the Kalgoorlie Goldfields.

GET THERE: Cape Le Grand NP is a 30-minute drive east of Esperance, which is an eight-hour drive from Perth.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

AUSTRALIA

- **Tarkine, Tasmania** This forgotten wilderness is ringed by empty nameless beaches, dotted with aboriginal middens
- **Murrays Beach, NSW** Crystal waters, caves and fine diving in Booderee NP
- **Little Waterloo Bay, Wilsons Prom, Victoria** Fine sand nearish Melbourne, accessible only by overnight hike

Secret Beaches



21 HA'APAI TONGA

BEST FOR... Polynesian culture, snorkelling, wow-factor

WHY GO? Most of Ha'apai's scattering of 62 islands are tiny, low-lying coral atolls. Add in the lack of infrastructure (don't expect telly) and perhaps the most traditional Polynesian culture in the region, and you have an old-school Pacific paradise.

WHAT TO DO: The diving and snorkelling is sublime; try the sea-cave sites around Ofolanga. Sleep in a *fale* (open-sided thatch hut).

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Absorb local culture (including a hula hula dance) on one of Ha'apai's 17 inhabited islands; Pangai, on Lifuka, is the main hub (population circa 3,000). Learn about maritime history – the Mutiny on the *Bounty* happened here.

GET THERE: Lifuka has an airport, with connections to the Tongan capital, on Tongatapu.

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

SOUTH PACIFIC

- **Nokan Hui islet, New Caledonia** A drop of castaway-paradise in the Pacific
- **Luganville, Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu** Dive the vast wreck of the *SS President Coolidge* right from this shore; for more beautiful sands, head north for Champagne Beach instead
- **Tikehau, Tahiti** Unbelievable bay- and islet-fringed lagoon; pack a snorkel

22 POLIHALE BEACH, KAUAI HAWAII

BEST FOR... Cliffs, sunsets, sleep outs

WHY GO? Secreted down a dirt track on Hawaii's oldest, most dramatically sculpted isle, Polihale rewards those who make the effort with gorgeous yellow sand, blisteringly blue water, rolling dunes and cracking views of the Na Pali Coast cliffs.

WHAT TO DO: Pack a picnic for a campsite stay – enjoy a super sunset, then spend the night by the sea. If the water's calm, take a dip (though currents can be strong).

WHILE YOU'RE THERE: Hike the Na Pali Coast (only accessible on foot), amid the native forest of Koke'e State Park and into Waimea Canyon.

GET THERE: Polihale is 8km from Mana Village, off Kauai's Highway 50. 📍

TOP 3 ALTERNATIVES

USA

- **Smugglers Cove, Oregon** Old sitka spruce, super surf and pirate legends in wild Oswald West State Park
- **Cayucos, California** A beach a-sparkle with smoothed shards of coloured glass
- **Black Sand Beach, Prince William Sound, Alaska** Glacier and mountain meet the shore; very cool kayaking

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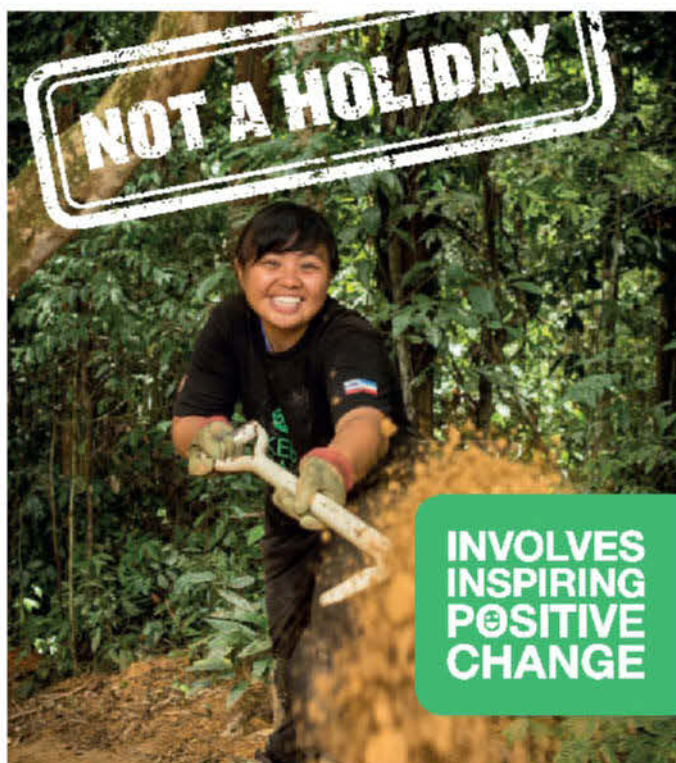
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Avoid giving a gift of a clock or watch in China. The Chinese words for “to give a clock” sound exactly the same as the words for “to take someone to their death”.



In Ghana the older people feel responsible for children in their midst. “It takes a whole village to raise a child”.



In Thailand, the top of the head is the most important part of the body because it is here that a person’s spirit resides. For this reason one should never even pat a child on the head.



Do not refuse refreshment in India without good reason, as this is seen as an insult. It is customary to refuse the first offer, but to accept the second or third.



In Russia if you can’t drink you may well be viewed with suspicion, as a person who can’t be trusted.



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Bright and bold
The shantytown
of Jalousie spills
down a mountainside
in Port-au-Prince



Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Look beyond the negative headlines – the Haitian capital is an intoxicating blend of Latin and African culture tinged with French influences, discovers **Phoebe Smith**

i Before you arrive

Mention to anyone that you're heading to Haiti and you will undoubtedly face three questions: Why? What about the earthquake? And is it safe?

Your answers should be: because it's one of the most unique places in the world, with a fascinating history (the most successful slave rebellion ever happened here). The earthquake was four years ago so don't expect to see much rubble. And yes, if you take the same precautions that you would in any major city, your visit should be problem-free – Haiti actually has a lower violent crime rate than many other Caribbean countries.

Its capital, Port-au-Prince, is an experience in itself. Stretching from the coast to the mountains, it's a sprawl of ornate Victorian-style buildings (known as 'gingerbread houses') and modern concrete structures, with street vendors squeezed into every crevice in between, selling everything from food to art. Always chaotic – traffic jams are

a fact of life – a mix of cars, *taptaps* (elaborately decorated pick-ups) and pedestrians fill the streets at all hours. There's never a dull moment, so forget any preconceptions and prepare to be dazzled by this captivating corner of the Caribbean.

✈ At the airport

Aéroport International Toussaint Louverture is the gateway to Port-au-Prince. American Airlines (aa.com) offers direct daily flights from Miami (2hrs) and New York (4hrs); returns cost from £183. Remember, when flying via the USA, you require an ESTA (<https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/esta>). Before arrival in Haiti you must fill in an immigration card (handed out on the plane); keep the stamped 'Departure' portion – you will need it to leave.

The airport is small but relatively modern, with an array of shops and stalls as well as tourist information. Note, porters will expect a tip (US\$1-2) if they carry your bag from the carousel, or if they

carry your bags to check-in for you when you return to the airport – this is not a complimentary service.

🚗 Getting into town

Most hotels offer pick-ups for guests – ask when booking. If not, select one of the many taxi drivers who will approach you as you leave arrivals. Make sure they have a badge to prove they are part of the Association des Chauffeurs Guide d'Haiti. Agree on a price before setting off – expect to pay US\$30-40 for a ride into town.

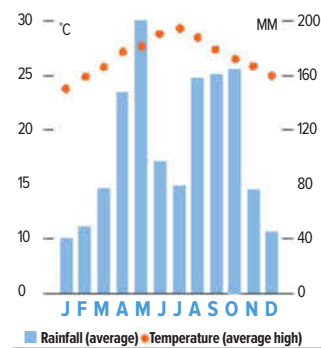
🚌 Other ways to arrive

It is possible to access Haiti overland, from the neighbouring Dominican Republic. The main route is Santo Domingo to Port-au-Prince. Capital Coach Line (www.capitalcoachline.com) operates buses on this route; journey time is around six hours, and tickets cost from US\$40/75 one way/return. Border taxes cost US\$20. ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

Population: 2.2 million
Language: Haitian Creole, French; little English is spoken, especially in rural areas
Timezone: GMT-5 (Mar-Nov GMT-4)
International dialling code: +509
Visas: Not required by UK nationals for stays of up to 3 months
Currency: Haitian gourde (HTG), currently around 70HTG to the UK£. US\$ are widely accepted in hotels, larger stores and even by many street vendors.
Highest viewpoint: Observatoire Haiti,



on Mount Boutilliers, is a café with great views (30min drive from downtown).

Health issues: Ensure you're up to date with hepatitis A, typhoid, tetanus, polio and diphtheria inoculations. Also consider the cholera vaccine. Haiti is high risk for malaria – take prophylaxis. Some mosquitoes carry chikungunya – take precautions (DEET-based insect repellent; impregnated clothing). Drink only purified or bottled water.

Recommended guidebooks:

Haiti (Bradt, 2012)

Web resources: experiencehaiti.org

Climate: Tropical, with temperatures from 22°C (Dec-Mar) to 30°C (Apr-Nov). Hurricane season is June-November.



TOP TIP

Keep a look out for graffiti by 'the Haitian Banksy', aka Jerry. Usually political, his most famous work was painted post 2010-earthquake: a map of Haiti with a crying eye and the plea, 'We need help'.

■ First Day's Tour

Start by learning about Haiti's successful slave revolt at the **National Pantheon Museum** (Rue de la Republique; entry 125HTG). Ask for an English-speaking guide. After that, explore the **Champs de Mars**. The National Palace used to stand here but was destroyed in the 2010 earthquake; a red fence now lines the former perimeter. There are many street vendors selling paintings here. Haggle while wandering among statues of key figures including **Le Negre Marron** aka 'the unknown slave', freeing his shackles and calling a revolution with a conch.

From there head to **The Iron Market** (Marché de Fer; pictured right). This bright-red structure was originally intended to be part of Cairo train station. It has two halls – one for food, the other for art, crafts and vodou paraphernalia.

For lunch, take a taxi or – if you're feeling intrepid – a *taptap* (picture, left) up to **Observatoire Haiti** for food and views over the town.

Spend your afternoon in the district of **Pétionville**, full of restaurants and boutique shops. Visit the district of **Croix**



des Bouquets, where local artists make sculptures from scrap metal, or take a tour of the **Barbancourt Rum distillery** (16 Rue Bonne Foi; barbancourt.net).

End with a night at the **Hotel Oloffson** (see below left) where you can eat and, on Thursdays, listen to RAM – the resident vodou rock band.



■ Where to Stay

Top end: Port-au-Prince is experiencing something of a hotel boom with a new Best Western Premier and Royal Oasis (by Occidental) now open. But for a high-end family-run option try the enchanting Villa Thérèse (13 Rue Léon; www.hotelvillatherese.com), a tranquil escape amid the chaos of downtown. Doubles from US\$175 (£109).

Mid-range: The legendary Hotel Oloffson (60 Avenue Christophe; www.hoteloloffson.com; pictured above) was

made famous by Graham Greene in his 1966 novel *The Comedians*. Today the rooms may be a little tired, the verandas creaky, but a stay at this old gingerbread house is a must, for the chance to drink a Barbancourt rum next to the pool and shake hands with a statue of Baron Samedi. Doubles from US\$100 (£63).

Budget: Eucalyptus Guest House (6 Impasse Nezivar; eucalyptusguesthouse.com) is near the airport. Half-board doubles from US\$50pppn (£31).

■ Stay or Go

Stay a little – but then explore further: Haiti offers so much more than its capital.

Head south up the winding mountain roads to the rural area along the **Route de Kenscoff** (above) to escape the smog and heat of downtown – it's always at least 10°C cooler in the hills. Here the pace slows and there are opportunities to hike from country guesthouses and to explore market towns.

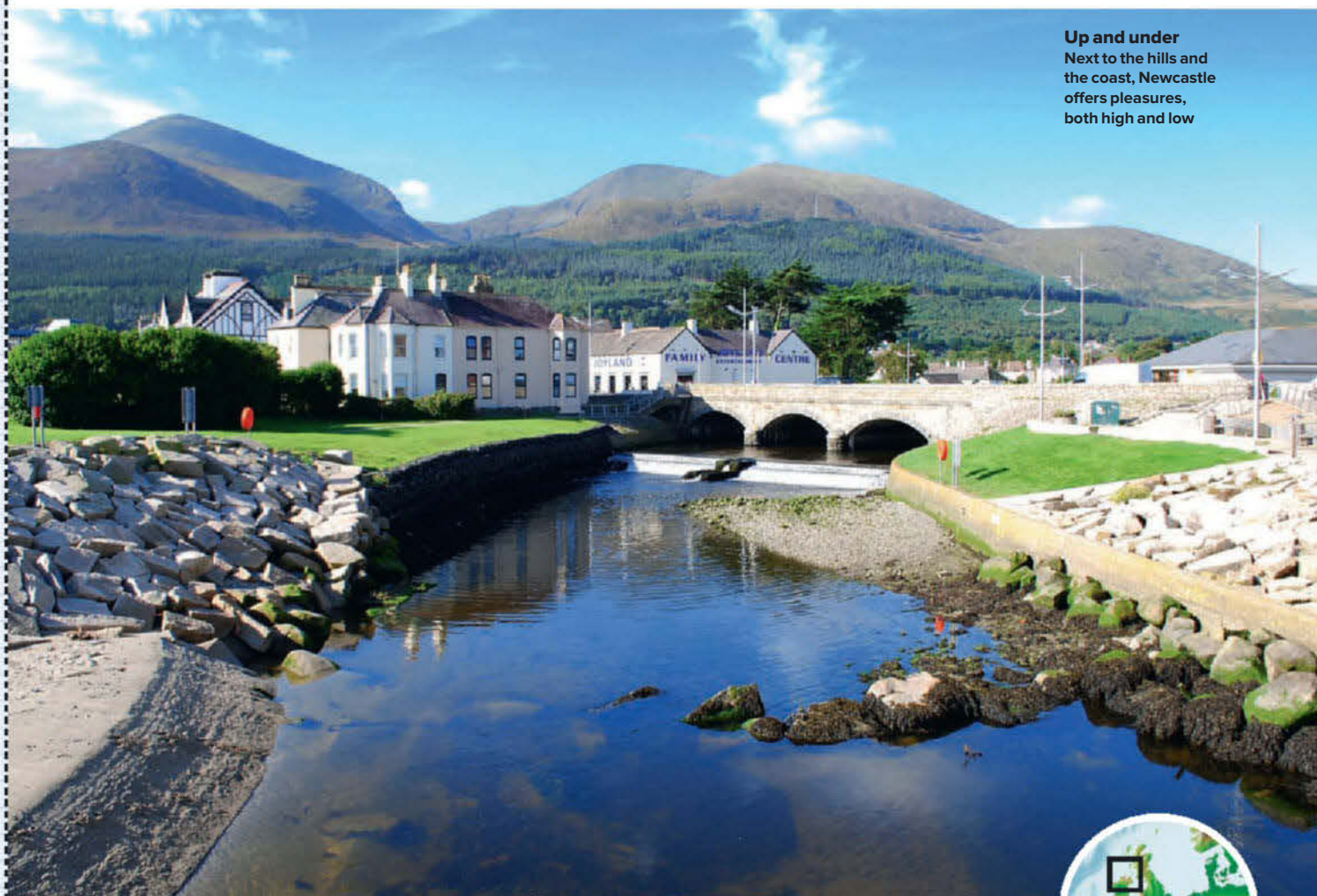
To enjoy the coast go to **Côtes des Arcadins** on National Route 1 – the place

where Haitians holiday; islands and hillside villages await.

If you have time, head south to **Jacmel**, an artist stronghold with a laid-back vibe; it's also home to the country's best carnival (February).

To learn more about Haiti's history jump on a plane to **Cap-Haïtien**. Haiti's second city is also the access point for the **Citadelle la Ferrière**, built high on a mountain to protect the country in 1804 following Haitian independence.

Up and under
Next to the hills and the coast, Newcastle offers pleasures, both high and low



Newcastle, Northern Ireland

Lapped by the Irish Sea, shadowed by the Mourne Mountains and sprinkled with a little magic, Newcastle is the gem of County Down, discovers **Alexandra Gregg**

This is the land of Narnia. Where we are now; all that lies between the lamppost and the great castle of Cair Paravel on the Eastern Sea.” There’s no faun-frequented lamppost in the Mourne Mountains; no fortress, no talking lion. But with their sweeping valleys, concealed lochs and verdant, history-soaked hills, you can see why these wild peaks inspired Belfast-born writer CS Lewis. They’re full of hidden treasures, folklore and wonder. They are Narnia. And Newcastle – the Gateway to the Mournes – is the wardrobe.

Despite escaping the worst of the Northern Ireland troubles, Newcastle’s appeal as a tourist destination has long been overshadowed by the conflict. Most travellers prefer to head further south, to the Republic of Ireland, or north to County Antrim and the Giant’s Causeway. And on the surface this seaside town does look nothing more than a confection of seasonal

arcades, funfairs and cafés. Dig deeper though and you’ll quickly discover that there’s a secret side to this fine little town.

Newcastle isn’t much like its Geordie namesake. It sits in County Down, a 40-minute drive south of Belfast and at the foot of Slieve Donard – Northern Ireland’s highest mountain. Most hikers make a beeline for the 850m headliner, but there are 30-plus other peaks to conquer too, most with easy access points from the town. You could tackle craggy Bearnagh, for example, or get panoramic views from the aptly-named Silent Valley.

Waterbabies should head out into Newcastle harbour to spot colonies of seals, migrating seabirds and caves once used by booze-hungry smugglers. For a postcard-perfect beach, with Newcastle Main Street and the Mournes as a backdrop, drive down the main Belfast-Newcastle road (A2) for five minutes until you

reach the Cottage Café car park. This is the entry point for the 6,000-year-old ecosystem that is Murlough Nature Reserve. An easygoing 4km walk reveals the reserve’s fragile network of dunes and heather, home to over 500 species of moths and butterflies as well as a wealth of birds – including fieldfare, redwing, skylarks, meadow pipits and over-wintering wildfowl and waders.

Or, if mystery is your thing, head south-east on the B27 to the magnetic hill at Spelga Dam. Nestled between the mountains of Pigeon, Cock and Spelga, the slope has a touch of fairy magic: cars roll uphill, not down, here.

This whole area is still an unknown quantity. There’s so much to discover – and you could spend weeks doing it. However, it’s possible to enjoy a small slice over a long weekend. The best way to start is to fly into Belfast City bright and early on a Friday morning – don’t worry, that sea air will soon wake you up... ►

◀ HERE'S THE PLAN...

■ Essential Info

When to go: The Mourne can be enjoyed year-round, though weather can be changeable – expect fog, rain and even snow any time of the year. Late spring and early autumn are good times to miss peak crowds and enjoy milder weather. Pack waterproofs whatever the season.

Getting there: Flybe (flybe.com) is launching a new flight from London City to Belfast City on 27 October. Flight time is around 90 minutes; fares start from £39.99 one-way. Flybe also flies to Belfast from other UK airports, including our 2014 reader vote favourite: Southampton.

Getting around: Hire a car; a rep from Dan Dooley (dan-dooley.ie) can meet you at the airport and take you to your vehicle. There is plenty of free parking in Newcastle, including Donard car park, for access to the Mourne.

Where to stay: Family-run Amble In B&B (Newcastle; 028 4372 4552;

newcastlebandb.com) is well placed for easy access to the Mourne and the towns' shops, restaurants and harbour. Owners Frances and Colm are keen to share their knowledge and cook a great breakfast. Eco-friendly rooms (with loos flushed by rainwater) from £37.50ppn.

More info: discovernorthernireland.com



TOP TIP

Visit one of Newcastle's cake shops for a slab of Fifteen – a traybake named for its ingredients: 15 cherries, 15 marshmallows, 15 digestive biscuits, 15g desiccated coconut, 150g condensed milk. Delicious.

Day 1: EXPLORE THE DUNES

Catch an early flight to get to Belfast by brunchtime. Pick up a rental car and drive to Newcastle; it takes about 45 minutes, and for half of that time your periphery will be filled with mountain and sea views along the **Mourne Coastal Route**.

In Newcastle, stop in Donard car park and head onto Main Street to admire the peaks above, colourful buildings below. Head for the **Annesley Building** to see the town's war memorial (pictured): a proud lion, with the Mourne behind. Just opposite the monument is **Seasalt Deli**, a great stop for an early lunch – try the chicken, ham, brie, stuffing and garlic-mayo sandwich.

From here it's a 7km drive to **Murlough** – Ireland's first nature reserve (nationaltrust.org.uk/murlough). This expanse of sand dunes, heather, bracken and fields is home to 23 species of butterfly –



including the marsh fritillary – wild ponies and one of the most beautiful beaches in County Down. Follow the waymarked south end trail for a taster, then head off-piste – instead of turning back onto the trail from the beach, walk along a little further for the chance to spot hundreds of seals basking on **Dundrum Bay**.

For dinner, tuck into hearty, locally sourced grub at the Victorian-inspired **Brunel's** (Bryansford Rd; brunelsrestaurant.co.uk).



Day 2: HIKE THE MOUNTAINS

Fill up on breakfast, pack snacks and water, and head for the **Mourne**. While most walkers make a beeline for Slieve Donard or the Brandy Pad – a smugglers' route from the sea through the mountains – instead do as the locals do. Head for Meelmore Lodge car park and make your way to the 586m peak of **Slievenaglogh**.

Known as the 'mountain of the stones' you'll cross heaps of hand-cut rock, all carefully quarried in the 19th century. At the summit you'll get your first glimpse of the **Mourne Wall**, a manmade stone barricade, running for 35km across 12 of the Mourne's highest peaks. From here descend to

the smugglers' route, follow the ridge up Corragh and Commedagh, or tackle the distinctive Bearnagh.

For an even more secluded trek, try rocky Doan via the Ott Track. From this peak you can see the Silent Valley (pictured) and Ben Crom Dam; you can also venture down to **Lough Shannagh**, an untouched stretch of water with a peaceful, sandy beach. If you want a guide, try Loretto Coyle (loretto@outdoorirelandnorth.co.uk).

End a day with dinner at the **Slieve Donard Resort** (hastingshotels.com). The restaurant isn't cheap, but the food's good and the hotel offers grand views of its namesake mountain.

Day 3: HIT THE WATER

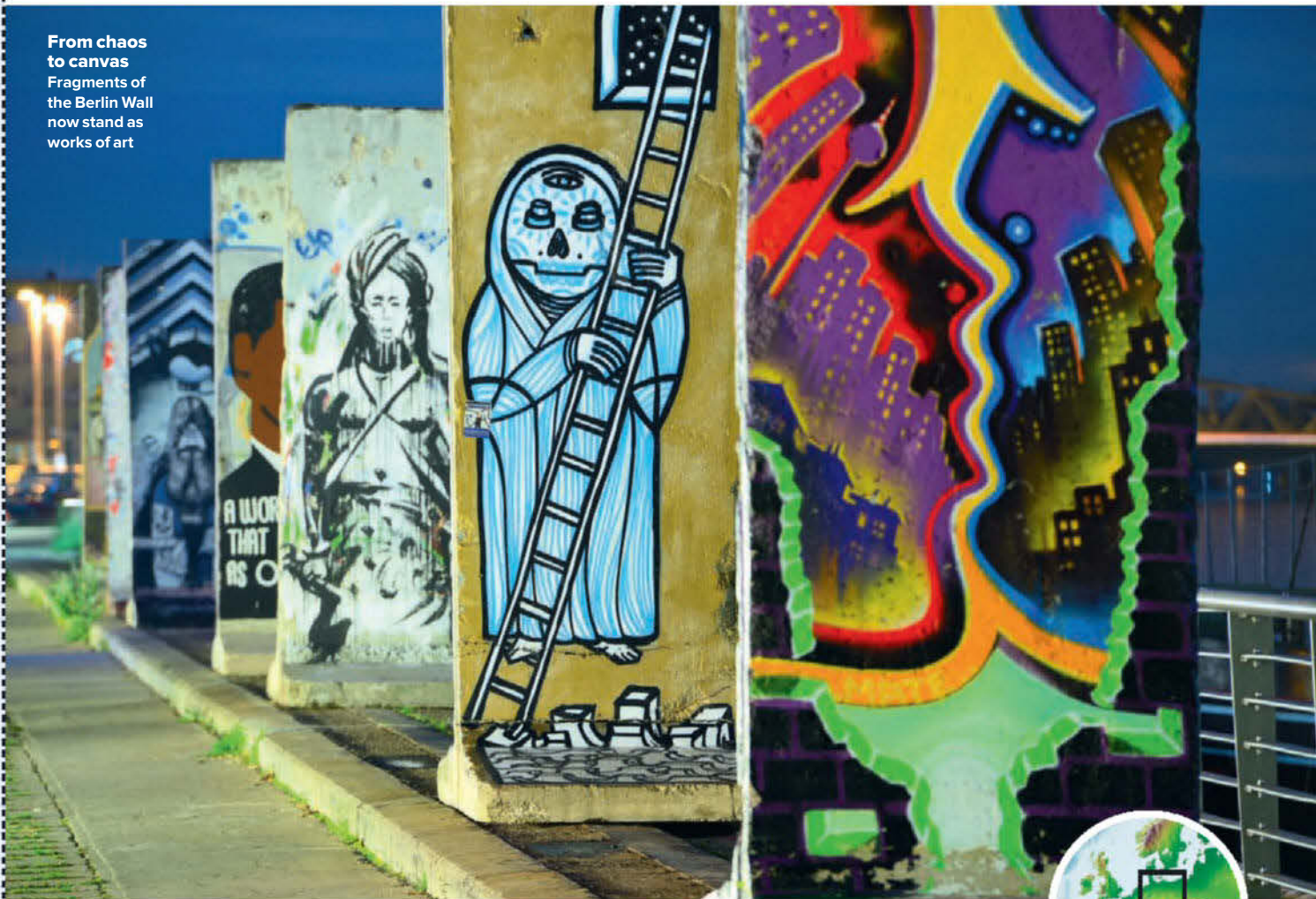
Use your last day to stay at sea-level. A former Victorian bathing town, **Newcastle** is home to the only seaweed bathhouse in the UK; at **Soak** you can take to a tub of slimy seaweed, which is collected fresh from the town's shores daily (£25; soakseaweedbaths.co.uk). It may feel like sitting in salty gunge, but your skin will love it – especially if you suffer from eczema or psoriasis.

After lunch, take a **RIB boat trip** from Newcastle harbour with Clearsky Adventure Centre (clearsky-adventures.com; prices from £260 private charter, £18pp on select days). You can spot seal colonies, stop off

at pretty lighthouses and get great views of the Mourne merging into the water. Alternatively, Clearsky will also take you out on a RIB boat in **Strangford Loch** (40min drive) to spot common and grey seals, witness the low-tide whirlpools (above) and hear the 'gurgle gurgle' of the sea caves at Ballyhornan Cliffs.

For dinner, sample the local catch at **Mourne Seafood Bar** (Dundrum; mounseaseafood.com). It sells fresh fish from day boats, as well as mussels, oysters and cockles from shellfish beds in Carlingford Lough. It's the perfect way to end an action-packed short break. 📌

From chaos to canvas
Fragments of the Berlin Wall now stand as works of art



Berlin Wall, Germany

November 2014 marks 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall – a good excuse to visit the vibrant, varied, hip and historic German capital for a long weekend...

i Get orientated

It started in 1961, with rolls of barbed wire dividing the streets. But Die Berliner Mauer – the Berlin Wall – quickly became a more permanent structure: a 4m-high brick barrier, bolstered by a secondary wall of reinforced concrete, overlooked by watchtowers and patrolled by soldiers and guard dogs. It ran for 160km, dissecting Potsdamer Platz and making a border crossing of the beautiful Oberbaumbrücke, a double-decker bridge spanning the River Spree.

For 28 years the barricade divided East and West Berlin, a very literal boundary between democracy and Communism at the height of the Cold War. It was the focal point of hostilities between Russia and the USA; 192 people were killed trying to cross it.

Eventually mounting civilian pressure resulted in the wall being torn down on 9 November 1989. Now, 25 years on, only fragments remain.

✈ Getting there

EasyJet (easyjet.com) flies direct from various UK airports to Berlin Schönefeld. Returns cost from £53; flight time is from 1hr 45mins.

The airport (berlin-airport.de) is 18km south-east of central Berlin. Getting to the city centre is straightforward; the fastest route is via the Airport Express train, which takes 30 minutes to reach the Central Station. A single ticket costs €3.20 (£2.50). S-Bahn trains, buses and trams also link the airport to the city. If you prefer to get a taxi, expect to pay over €45 (£35.70).

🚶 The visit

If possible, visit during the anniversary. On the weekend of 9 November, a new type of wall will be forged: thousands of illuminated, helium-filled balloons will create a 12km border of light across the city; celebrations will reach a crescendo when the balloons are cut free.

There's still plenty to see year-round though. Visit Checkpoint Charlie, on Friedrichstrasse – once the only crossing point for foreigners between East and West Berlin. Today a replica booth, complete with sandbags, marks the spot.

Next head to the East Side Gallery, in Friedrichshain (eastsidegallery-berlin.de). Here you'll find a 1,316m stretch of original wall, which is emblazoned with artwork and satirical images. Another section of the wall along Bernauer Strasse is now an official place of remembrance (berliner-mauer-gedenkstaette.de).

The keen historian can follow the Berliner Mauerweg (Berlin Wall Trail), which traces the line of the former fortifications. The 160km route has been divided into 14 sections, making it easy to plan a foray on foot or by bike.

If that's not enough, don't forget the city's other 420 galleries, 50 theatres and 153 museums! See visitberlin.de for more info. ►

◀ Berlin before reunification

The Berlin Wall cut the city in half, severing its main transport arteries, the S-Bahn and U-Bahn lines. West Berliners were excluded from the centre. Alongside the wall was a no-man's-land: the so-called 'death zone'.



◆ Berlin Wall

Protected to the east by land mines, the wall – known by the East German authorities as the Anti-Fascist Protection Rampart – surrounded West Berlin.

◆ Soviet War Memorial

Part of West Berlin, the area around this monument to Red Army troops killed in the 1945 Battle of Berlin was closed for many years due to attacks on its Soviet guards.



◆ Tränenpalast (Palace of Tears)

Until 1989 the Tränenpalast, next to the final S-Bahn station in East Berlin, was a border checkpoint for S-Bahn passengers heading west.



◆ Checkpoint Charlie

This border crossing between the American and Soviet sectors was used by foreign citizens and diplomats. It was the location of many dramatic events during the years of the Cold War.



◆ Haus am Checkpoint Charlie

This museum houses photos and other wall memorabilia, including a selection of escape vehicles.



◆ Luftbrücke Monument

This striking memorial commemorates those who died during the Berlin Airlift of 1948-9. Allied planes delivered 2.3 million tons of supplies to West Berlin in the face of the year-long Soviet Blockade.



◆ East Side Gallery

The longest remaining section of the Berlin Wall became an open-air gallery in 1990, covered with an eclectic mix of paintings by 118 artists.



■ Essentials

Language: German

Time: GMT+1 (Mar-Oct GMT+2)

Visas: Not required by UK nationals

Money: Euro (€), currently €1.26 to the UK£

Health: Apply for a free EHIC card (ehic.org.uk), and take out comprehensive travel insurance too. Tap water is safe to drink. No specific vaccinations are required.



This feature is adapted from the *DK Eyewitness Travel Guide: Berlin 2014* (£13.99), the best visual guide to the country.
www.traveldk.com

Dawn of a divided city

In 1945, as part of the post-war peace, Berlin was divided into four zones of occupation: Soviet, American, British and French. Hostilities erupted in June 1948 when the Soviets blockaded West Berlin in an attempt to bring the area under their control. The ensuing year-long standoff marked the start of the Cold War. By the 1950s, economic problems in the East had led to bloodily suppressed riots and a mass exodus to the West. In 1961 the East German government constructed the Berlin Wall to contain its citizens.

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- * Videographer
- * Communications Officer
- * Project Manager
- * Spanish interpreter (Costa Rica & Nicaragua only)
- * Medics (doctors, nurses and paramedics)
- * Adventure Mountain Leader

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All our volunteer managers are expected to fundraise for Raleigh International. Fundraising targets vary but once in country Raleigh will cover the cost of your training, accommodation, food, specialist equipment, insurance (excluding personal belongings cover).

Our assessment weekends are a great opportunity to meet like minded people while learning more about this opportunity. The next is on the 22nd - 23rd November 2014. A telephone interview can be arranged for international candidates.

For more information visit our website or email us at volunteermanagers@raleighinternational.org. We are keen to hear from *Wanderlust* readers so please mention them in your enquiry or application.

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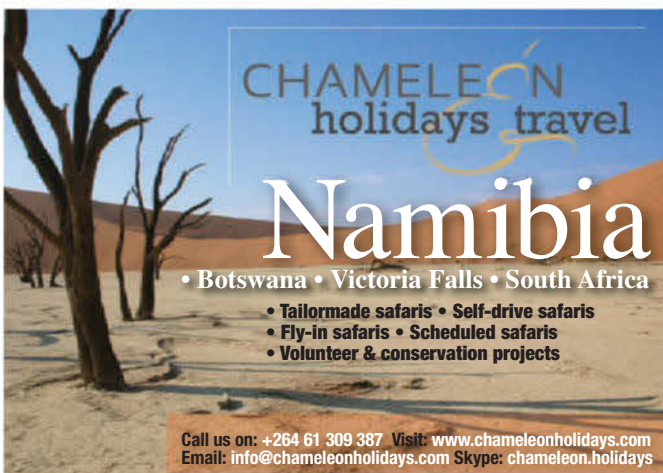
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■ Travel Company Tales



Mundy Adventures

Edwina Lonsdale

Galápagos galleonier, adventure seeker and managing director of Mundy Cruising and Mundy Adventures

How did Mundy get started?

In 1970, our founder Paul Mundy created Mundy Cruising as a cruise-only retailer – right at the time people predicted cruising was dead. Since then, we've been forging our own path, selling the best holiday experiences to the most discerning travellers. So when cruising became mainstream, Mundy didn't. Instead we've continued to focus on our exclusive niche – travel by water for people who want something different...

Already passionate about the sea, I joined the company in 1989, leading a management buyout ten years later, yet maintaining the ethos of a small, family-owned business. Mundy Cruising still prospers, but now we have a new, exciting arm: Mundy Adventures.

Early challenges?

We learned some hard lessons early about how global events can affect business. For some weeks after the 9/11 tragedy we were refunding money faster than we earned it. How you behave in such circumstances creates important foundations for the future: great relationships with our staff, clients and partners were forged.



What makes Mundy unique?

Mundy Adventures offers tailor-made adventure holidays for those wanting authentic once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Some of the most breathtaking places on earth can only be reached by water, so Mundy offers a superb portfolio of small ships and river boats, sailing to places with no tourist infrastructure.

It does not operate its own expedition ships – it leaves that to the experts in each of the regions it visits. What we do is help its people identify the right ship or expedition for them, take care of the logistics of getting to the ship, and enhance their trip by adding on-land programmes before and after the expedition.

The team at Mundy has a wealth of tales to tell too: from spotting a pod of killer whales in Alaska's Glacier Bay to watching the antics of a pair of blue-footed boobies in the Galápagos or spying a lone penguin on the ice in Antarctica.

Future plans?

We are excited about an extraordinary journey through the Northeast Passage; a new itinerary from the Cook Islands to Polynesia visiting the corals of the Southern Line Islands, identified as one of most unspoiled reef systems in the world; grey whale watching at Bahía Magdalena and snorkelling among gentle whale sharks in Bahía de La Paz.

www.mundyadventures.co.uk



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Steampunk showpiece

A colossal confection of scrap metal and salvaged odds and sods, this mechanical octopus known as *El Pulpo Mecanico* roars atop the chassis of a 1973 Ford 250, spitting 200 gallons of propane flame into a crisp blue sky. It's just one example of the many goggle-eyed, eight-limbed creations you can see at the annual Burning Man festival in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada. This particular offering is the brainchild of Duane Flatmo, whose creative juices were

sparked by his obsession with found materials and a love for the annual gathering. "I had saved clippings of Burning Man for 20 years, but never attended. When I went out there I was blown away," he says. Flatmo is not the only one – there are dozens more expressive, impressive works from the festival in a new photobook.

***Burning Man: Art on Fire* (Race Point, £23) by Jennifer Raiser, Scott London and Sidney Erthal, is out now.**

DISCOVER YOUR INNER EXPLORER

We went to Dominica searching for a place where we could leave the chaos of the world behind and renew our sense of adventure. We dreamed of hiking mountains, exploring hidden beaches, breathing in the rich tropical air—rediscovering what it felt like to get back to nature and play like a kid again. Our expedition led us to the Boiling Lake in the Morne Trois Pitons National Park. As we stood upon the steaming ledge of her crater, we realized why we started looking in the first place. We were yearning for something different, something adventurous, and something more visceral. We realized we needed to discover our inner explorer and Dominica gave us more than we ever dreamed of. – Sam & Alex – New York

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Photo of Boiling Lake, by Sam Horine (@samhorine)

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